

**Faiths Together? Muslim-Christian Co-Working on a Publicly Funded  
Project in Beeston Hill, South Leeds**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

The academic study of inter-faith dialogue has been dominated by textual, theological, philosophical and historical studies such as those of John Hick and Gavin D'Costa. In this thesis a new approach is taken, suggested by the work of Jacques Waardenburg and Hugh Goddard, which looks at the reality of dialogue in a religiously diverse neighbourhood in the UK. The primary focus is dialogue between Muslims and Christians, and particularly the relationship between what Gerd Baumann terms the 'demotic' discourse of local residents, and the 'dominant' discourse of those who have leadership roles, either locally or nationally, in the community.

'Faith Together in Leeds 11' is a unique project in Beeston Hill, Leeds, UK, where Muslim, Christian and secular partners have worked together to address the needs of the neighbourhood. Having considered the national, local and religious context of this co-working, and the methodological and theoretical context of the research, the thesis then discusses the main issues arising from the fieldwork. The nature of 'identity' and 'community' in dialogue between Muslims and Christians, the role of religion in the public square, and the relationship between formal and informal models and experiences of inter-faith dialogue, are discussed as both theoretical and practical concerns.

The conclusions of this thesis are surprisingly varied, reflecting as they do the range of analytical methods and approaches required, but also the complexity of the small scale and the local. However, one conclusion is found to be relevant throughout: that in Beeston Hill *individual attitudes and beliefs rest as much, if not more, on demotic experience as on dominant teachings*. This challenges dominant theological discourses of inter-faith dialogue, and is of significance for policy agendas which seek to capitalise on the resources of faith communities.

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## Introduction

In the Introduction to his 2003 collection *Muslims and Others* Jacques Waardenburg expresses the hope that:

...this book may encourage further precise research on encounters between Muslims and others in the past and at present. In what situations have they taken place? What have the religions or ideologies of the parties concerned taught about meeting others? How have the people themselves in fact acted in such encounters? What can be said about the role not only of practical needs, but also of imagination and broader reflection in these encounters? (2003: viii).

This study is an example of such research. Through the particular study of one local setting, some of the questions Waardenburg poses are answered and analysed. There is a relative lack of empirical studies which relate the scholarly enterprise of inter-faith dialogue with the lived realities of local communities. This study uses a range of approaches to explore and analyse what happens when Muslims and Christians come into contact with one another through publicly funded co-working and in publicly funded spaces. In so doing this thesis is intended to provide an example of a new approach to the study of inter-faith dialogue, which steps away from the text and the scholar's study and into the empirical reality of multifaith Britain.

'Inter-faith dialogue' is both a theological enterprise with a long history, and a concept recently adopted by the state as potentially valuable for the community cohesion policy agenda; the relationship between these two uses of inter-faith dialogue has yet to be questioned; equally, the relationship between the dominant theological and political discourses of inter-faith dialogue, and the grassroots experience of dialogue, has yet to be analysed. In this study, it is shown that the need for dialogue between the dominant and the demotic, and between the theoretical frameworks used in theology and policy, is as great as the need for dialogue between Muslims and Christians.<sup>1</sup> 'Dialogue' is used in this study to refer to any form of interaction, either between people or religious traditions, either inter-religious or intra-religious. This is partly to underline the fact that all encounter is dialogue, but is partly also to reclaim the word for the demotic forms of dialogue which have traditionally been seen as less important by those involved in the dominant discourse of theology and community. There is considerable variety and debate around academic usage of the word 'dialogue', for instance in postmodern

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'demotic', and the contrast with dominant discourses, is borrowed from the work of Gerd Baumann (1996) and is used to indicate the grassroots and locally prevalent discourse as opposed to the reified dominant discourse. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter one.



debates in areas such as hermeneutic philosophy (see for example: Maranhão, 1990); however it is neither necessary nor possible to engage with these debates and definitions within this study. It is worth noting, however, that those commentators writing within the dominant discourse, and referred to here, often fail to justify their decisions about how they limit the definition of what is ‘proper’ dialogue. It is assumed throughout that ‘dialogue’ is in itself valuable, providing both opportunities for greater understanding and also a basis for more effective co-working and service provision.

The thesis begins with an extensive, but necessary, coverage of the methodological, national, local and religious context in which this study has been undertaken. After an overview of some of the principal methodological issues involved in the collection of data, the thesis then covers some of the main issues arising from the fieldwork. The main concerns are the nature of identity and community in dialogue between Muslims and Christians, the role of religion in the public square, and the relationship between formal and informal models and experiences of inter-faith dialogue. An important theme is the role of theology, and a series of observations are made concerning the way theology exists in relation to a neighbourhood that is only a few miles from two major Universities, but worlds away from the theological exercises that take place there.

The process for developing a research question which attempts to summarise the issues for research is exemplified in the approach of Harry Wolcott, who said of any study that ‘[p]lace and purpose have to intersect’ (1999: 39). The decision to pursue doctoral research with fieldwork based in a community based project in Leeds, West Yorkshire, was ‘the result of some serendipitous combination of time, place and station’ (1999: 228). Wolcott’s reflections on his career as an ethnographer, and particularly his identification of the significance of *place*, *purpose*, *time* and *station*, are useful in explaining the development of my research question.

My initial interest is in Muslim-Christian relations, and particularly the relationship between the demotic experience and discourse of the people at the grassroots of the community, and the dominant experience and discourse of those who have leadership roles in the community. The *purpose* of this study therefore is to discover, in the context of early 21<sup>st</sup> century relations between religions and the state, and inter-faith theology, what impact Muslim-Christian co-working on publicly funded projects has on individuals and communities. The *place* that presented itself was ‘Faith Together in

Leeds 11', a unique Muslim-Christian project in Beeston Hill, Leeds. The *timing* of my study was also significant in that I had previously undertaken a short case study when the project was in its pre-building infancy (Prideaux, 2002). When, on being awarded a scholarship,<sup>2</sup> the opportunity to undertake this longer study (*station*) presented itself, Faith Together in Leeds 11 was at its height – having seen the opening of two community buildings. A part-time three year period of fieldwork was possible in which to track the impact of the community buildings and the multifaith partnership. Purpose, place, time and station combined serendipitously to generate this study.

Early plans to include a comparative study of a different project, and a control study from a local school were dropped when it became clear that the information available within the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project was more than sufficient to maintain several detailed studies. In the absence of a control study, analysis of secondary sources provides comparative and supporting material, and helps to develop a sense of the extent to which the research findings are relevant outside the particularity of this locality.

Although the point is under-recognised in most scholarship of and about inter-faith dialogue, I will argue that interactions between individuals are as important as religious teachings or leadership examples in forming attitudes to those of a different faith. State-funded projects, which provide opportunities for individuals to develop friendships and contacts with those of other faiths, create opportunities for informal inter-faith dialogue between individual members of faith communities.<sup>3</sup> The initial research question which emerged from this observation, and the place, purpose, time and station of this project is:

- *When public money encourages faith communities to work together, as in Faith Together in Leeds 11, what impact is there on relationships between individuals and between faith communities?*

Related to this are further questions about the dynamics of power within and between 'communities', the understanding of religion in the 'public' and policy making domain,

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<sup>2</sup> Hibbert Scholar 2003-2008

<sup>3</sup> In the dominant state discourse the phrase 'faith communities' and terms such as 'faith-based organisations' are used, and 'faith' is used universally rather than 'religion'. For the sake of consistency and fluency, this form of words is used frequently in this study and the problematic nature of this language is discussed in chapter eight.



the intention and efficacy of state policy as regards religion, and the practicalities and issues involved in community project development. As well as providing a source of information for considering these questions, fieldwork around Faith Together in Leeds 11 also provides an opportunity to observe how 'success' is measured in inter-faith dialogue and relations, and where this 'success' is most often located – in the polite conversation of community leadership, or the nitty-gritty of community living.

Chapter one of this study is an important contextual introduction which places this study in its entirety within a methodological and theoretical framework. The academic field of religious studies can be seen to be diffuse and lacking clear direction or theoretical awareness. This first chapter therefore identifies some of the key issues of concern for the field of religious studies and relates them to the particularities of this study. It is argued that although these debates and issues must be considered, they do not require resolution in order for the study to proceed intact. They act, however, as important 'sensitizing' debates which alert us to some of the assumptions and problems which might be found in a study of this nature.

In chapter two the religious context for the study is analysed. The broad historical, social and political influences on interactions between Muslims and Christians, and the theological and organisational underpinnings are broadly outlined. A number of different forms of dialogue are identified, and an emphasis is placed on 'living' dialogue: a term adopted here to describe the dialogue of necessity and neighbourliness which characterises many of the contacts between people of different religions. As well as providing an important context for the specificity of the fieldwork, this chapter also sets out some of the basic concerns of this thesis, namely the role of dominant discourses of inter-faith dialogue in the lived realities of religiously diverse neighbourhoods, and the relative significance of the practical and the mundane as opposed to the theoretical and theological in the lives of Muslims and Christians in these neighbourhoods.

Chapter three provides a national context for the thesis, identifying some of the key features in the relationship between the state and the faiths in England, particularly in the contemporary period. The historical relationship between religion and the state, and particularly the nature of the established Church of England, is briefly discussed before a more extensive consideration of contemporary issues and particular moments which

demonstrate some of the key features of this relationship. These features include the increasing saliency of religion in state discourse, and how the Church of England specifically, but also other faith-based organisations, have responded to this discourse. This national context is important in both situating the local experience in Beeston Hill, but also in providing some context to the experience of, and response to, working with the state that is discussed in chapter eight.

Spatial analysis is employed in chapter four to extend the study of Beeston Hill and the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project, the local context for this study. After identifying some of the key features and problems in Beeston Hill, and some of the unique characteristics of the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project, the mental, social and physical space of Faith Together in Leeds 11 is discussed. This analysis leads to the identification of three important elements: identity, ownership and encounter, which both characterise the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project and relate to the needs and concerns of Beeston Hill.

The fieldwork methodology outlined and considered in chapter five acts in some ways as a bridge from the broad contextual considerations of the first half of the thesis, to the fieldwork specificity of the second half of the study. Issues concerning fieldwork method and ethics are discussed in order to demonstrate the degree to which the approach to fieldwork is entirely derived from the research question, and the context within which the field of study is constituted. The themes which underpin the following chapters: identity, community, policy and dialogue are identified as both implied by the research question itself, but also emerging from the real concerns of the people who were interviewed and observed during the fieldwork.

Chapter six moves the thesis from the broad contextual themes to specific issues encountered in the fieldwork. One key issue in the interviews and observations related to the nature and articulation of personal identity, and how this was mutually involving in dialogue between Muslims and Christians. This chapter therefore unpacks some of the ways in which personal identity was understood and expressed within the Beeston Hill context. Unlike the dominant discourse which represents personal, and particularly religious, identity as monolithic and singular, a demotic discourse of variety is displayed. Ethnicity and social economic status, as well as levels of religious observance and interaction with people of other faiths, are found to be as significant as



any particular theological teachings in how religious identity is expressed. Significantly for the realm of inter-faith dialogue, when Muslims and Christians come into contact with one another in Beeston Hill they bring with them this multiplicity and multi-relational identity, rather than conformity to a paradigmatic religious identity.

Following on from, and related to, the theme of personal identity, chapter seven explores the nature of community in Beeston Hill. In the light of the response to the London bombings of 2005, community is found to be as varied and as contested as identity. The nature of threats from the outside, and the networks and rhetoric that were used to mitigate these challenges illustrate not only how community was constructed and articulated in response to threat, but also how demotic uses of 'community' diverge from the dominant discourse of 'community' which informs policy agendas and relations between the state and religions.

The way in which religious leaders, members of religions, or faith-based organisations relate to the state partly relies on constructions of community and identity discussed in the preceding chapters. However, in chapter eight some of the local repercussions of the state's interest in religion are discussed. The importance of representation and funding provide the background for a consideration of the way pragmatism relates to idealism in local community activism. All small organisations experience difficulties in relating to the policy agendas and organisational structures of the state. These difficulties are compounded for the majority of faith-based organisations, which have only become involved in working alongside the state during the past two decades. Although the national hierarchy of the Church of England has a much longer history of involvement with the apparatus of the state than other religions, it is only recently that locally based Anglican projects have started to build their own partnerships with local and regional governmental bodies. All of these issues are found to have local ramifications and to relate to how Christians and Muslims work together and relate to each other.

In chapter nine the lived reality of Muslim-Christian dialogue in a religiously diverse neighbourhood is explored. Relating to the complex nature of identity and community, and the contested relationship with the state, this lived reality is seen to be at a distance to the reified activity of dialogue which is the usual fare of theological studies that is considered in chapter two. It is argued that although this lived reality does not necessarily deal with fundamental matters of truth or religious doctrine, in the same

manner as dominant theological discourses, this demotic dialogue is not without religious significance.

The detailed study of one small area opens avenues of interest and exploration in a variety of directions. The conclusions of this thesis are therefore surprisingly varied, reflecting as they do the range of analytical methods and approaches required, but also the complexity of the small scale and the local. In turn, the possibilities for further research are many, and are indicated throughout this study. However, one conclusion is found to be relevant throughout: that *individual attitudes and beliefs rest as much, if not more, on demotic experience as on dominant teachings*. In the context of inter-faith dialogue this challenges dominant theological discourses, and is of significance for policy agendas which seek to capitalise on the resources of faith communities. This study therefore indicates the gap between the dominant and demotic discourses surrounding inter-faith dialogue. Where the state seeks to address the needs of religiously diverse neighbourhoods, but is advised by religious leaders and representatives who are at a discursive distance from these neighbourhoods, this gap is of practical importance. The gap between representation and reality may limit the extent to which the needs of neighbourhoods are both identified and addressed. The most important potential area for further work following this study must, therefore, be how this gap is recognised and articulated, and whether it may be bridged.

## Chapter 1: The Theoretical and Methodological Context

In order to properly situate this study it is necessary to interact to at least some degree with issues of meta-theory and the nature of religious studies, the academic field in which my work is located. As this study contains some consideration of the role of theology in local communities, one of the most significant issues for me is that of the relationship between the academic fields of religious studies and theology. However, questions about whether religious studies exists as an academic 'field' or 'discipline', about whether the phenomenological method with which it is traditionally associated is redundant, about the impact of the social sciences on religious studies, and about whether or how theology relates to religious studies are all related and worthy of at least brief discussion.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.1. The Category of 'Religion'

The existence of a discrete facet of human experience and society called 'religion', which is accessible for academic study, is not a universally accepted principle. Although definitions and studies of the theme can be found in a variety of academic disciplines, including psychology, sociology and anthropology, it is my intention here to limit my consideration of the category of religion to a small group of contemporary scholars working in the field of religious studies. To do otherwise would be to tackle far too great a body of literature in too limited a space.<sup>5</sup>

Timothy Fitzgerald in *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (2000) argues that religious studies is concerned with promoting a subject 'religion', which other disciplines seek to deconstruct. Religion, Fitzgerald claims, should be seen as just another ideological category (2000:4),<sup>6</sup> and is in fact a Christian construct 'which other experiences have been reduced to during the process of colonialism' (2000: 5).<sup>7</sup> Russell McCutcheon,

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<sup>4</sup> What follows is a general theoretical and methodological reflection related to the thesis as a whole. Methodological issues specific to the fieldwork are discussed below in chapter five.

<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the whole area of religious, or mystical, experience, though central to some definitions and descriptions of religion, is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>6</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, as early as 1963, also argued that the term 'religion' was redundant: 'what men [sic.] have tended to conceive as religion and especially as a religion, can more rewardingly, more truly, be conceived in terms of two factors, different in kind, both dynamic: a historical 'cumulative tradition', and the personal faith of men and women' (1963: 175).

<sup>7</sup> It is pertinent that Fitzgerald is mainly academically concerned with Buddhism. Buddhism is perhaps one of the 'religions' which least fits the 'usual description', and from the point of view of the experience of groups labelled as 'Buddhist' there may be some weight to Fitzgerald's argument.



whose political and iconoclastic critique of religious studies assumes the separation of the field entirely from that of theology, also provides a critique of the nature of 'religion' in the academic world, and he argues that there is an assumption in all religious studies (or 'Science of Religion', or 'History of Religions') that there is a *sui generis* 'thing' called religion which is 'out there' and capable of study, although the study that occurs is mainly interpretative rather than explanatory (McCutcheon, 2003: 54). Although this is similar to the position taken by Fitzgerald, McCutcheon parts company with his co-protagonist in arguing that this does not invalidate the use of the term 'religion', or the field of study of which religion is the core, but it instead demands of scholars that:

...we must cease presuming that religion necessarily and solely denotes an inner world of unseen power and morality expressed in doctrine or ritual. Instead, we must historicize this very assumption, seeing 'religion' instead as a discursive technique used in specific rhetorical situations, a type of social classification with significant political import (2003: 42- 43).

McCutcheon's principal critique of the work of Fitzgerald is that by deferring religion to the broader category of 'culture', which Fitzgerald appears to advocate, the problem does not go away, but is deferred (2003: 240). McCutcheon's concern with religion as a discursive technique has similarities to the work of other scholars, such as Talal Asad (1993) and Gerd Baumann (1996), and his contention that 'the category of religion is a conceptual tool and ought not to be confused with an ontological category actually existing in reality' (1997: viii) is one that clearly associates him with those who separate the enterprise of theology from that of religious studies, an issue discussed below in section 1.5.

Further to the criticism of the entire concept of religion there is also a significant body of work, especially in sociology, which is concerned with secularisation and argues that religion is of decreasing significance in the modern world (S. Bruce, 2002). Philip Mellor (2004b) responds to such critiques by arguing that:

What such studies do not engage with satisfactorily is the fact that social realities are complex, multi-layered phenomena with religious aspects that are so deeply rooted that they not only tend to be unacknowledged, but may also be expressly denied (2004b: 5).

Drawing on, and engaging with, Durkheim's notion of 'hyper-spirituality', Mellor develops an understanding of religion as: 'a phenomenon that expresses, through actions and beliefs, a collective engagement with the possibilities of transcendence

emergent from the contingencies, potentialities and limitations of embodied human life' (2004b: 19). As opposed to McCutcheon's approach of seeing religion more as product of society than material basis for society, Mellor finds religion implicated throughout social life. Through reference to 'hyper-spirituality', Mellor uses religion as a route into defending the reality of society against those who argue that society is constructed by sociology, or has only existed historically.

This pattern of using a term or argument in one area (in Mellor's case, hyper-spirituality) as an analogy or example to defend or explain a term in another area (in Mellor's case, society) is also used by Malory Nye in an article from 2000 in which he uses anthropological writing concerning the 'culture concept' as a model for re-evaluating the 'religion concept'. By doing so, Nye demonstrates how religion can be deconstructed or rearticulated with reference to other, apparently similar concepts, in order to make 'it' a more amenable subject for study. Nye constructs an argument that scholars of religion should not be concerned with studying religion, but with studying religious practices - 'religioning' (2000: 467). He argues that:

...the politics of perpetuating religious studies as a discipline has taken priority over any sustained attempt to examine the political strategies that underline the construction of religion as an object (2000: 452).

Nye seeks to move away from a focus on monolithic concepts of religion and instead introduces religioning as concerned with dynamic and active agency:

Religioning is not a thing, with an essence, to be defined and explained. Religioning is a form of practice, like other cultural practices, that is done and performed by actors with their own agency (rather than being subsumed by their religions), who have their own particular ways and experiences of making their religiosities manifest. A discourse of religioning also moves away from looking at 'religion' in terms of 'religions' (Christianity, Islam Hinduism, etc.), but instead looks at religious influences and religious creativities, and the political dynamics through which certain conceptualizations of religious authenticity are produced and maintained (2000: 467).

This idea of 'religioning' is particularly useful within my own study, as I am concerned with what the word, phenomenon, or concept of religion 'does' rather than what religion 'is'. Although I will concern myself with the broad area of inter-faith theology, and offer some conclusions about the potential relationship between theology and the lived realities of faith communities, I will not be seeking to understand religion as an essence. This tension between religion and 'religioning' will be apparent at a number of points throughout this study.



Alongside these debates about 'religion' as a category, there are also issues pertaining to the study of specific instances of religion such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or Judaism. As the two religions with which I am principally concerned are Islam and Christianity, it is important to recognise that, although both 'Islam' and 'Christianity' are popularly used and recognised as hegemonic, globalised constructs, there is a difference in the way the two religions are constructed and recognised from an emic perspective.<sup>8</sup> As my fieldwork discussed in chapter six shows, practising Muslims and Christians carry very different understandings of what it means to be religious, and indeed of what 'religion' means. The anthropologist Asad argues that applying the term 'religion' to Islam requires some understanding of the term itself, because although 'religion is integral to modern Western history, there are dangers in employing it as a normalizing concept when translating Islamic traditions' (1993: 1). Principally, Asad argues that it is not possible to have a universal definition of religion 'not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes' (1993: 29). Asad identifies that religion is concerned as much with practice as with thought (1993: 43-44), an important correction to the assumption that religion is about belief first and action second.

More subtly than Fitzgerald, Asad argues that the term religion is a product of the West, but that it requires deconstruction in any setting, as does the setting (e.g. anthropology) in which it is being applied, rather than simply abandoning the term altogether. Being particularly concerned with power relations, Asad identifies ways in which the West has a 'peculiar historicity', linked to concepts including those concerning personal agency and the universal, as opposed to the local. He finds that 'religion, in its positive and negative senses, is an essential part of that construction' (1993: 23). His argument is that only if the anthropologist appreciates how they, and the religion being studied, are politically and historically positioned within this definitional heritage will they be able to effectively understand experiences which are not those of the West:

The anthropological student of *particular* religions should therefore begin from this point, in a sense unpacking the comprehensive concept which he or she translates as "religion" into heterogeneous elements according to its historical character (1993: 54 emphasis in original).

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<sup>8</sup> The terms 'emic' (insider) and 'etic' (outsider) are frequently used when considering what is known as the 'Insider/Outsider' debate in Religious Studies, and were originally coined by the linguist and anthropologist Kenneth Pike (1967).

Clearly, as Nye reflects, it is more important to ask why a group is defined as 'religious', and by whom, than to ask whether a group fits a pre-existing definition (2001: 203). For example, following these reflections from Asad, it is important, when studying Islam/Muslims and Christianity/Christians within the United Kingdom, to remain aware of the issues in the relationship between religion and ethnic identity. In a context where the dominant discourse can equate 'faith communities' with 'black and minority ethnic communities', the category of religion can be caught between understandings of 'what religion is' (essence, divinely inspired, hegemonic, universalising) and 'what religion does' (divide, define, separate, legitimate). The relationship between religious, ethnic and other commonly accepted 'markers' of identity (as discussed in, among others, Knott, 1986, 1992) will be returned to when considering my findings in relation to the nature of identity in chapter six.

It is clear that the category of 'religion' is not straightforward, either in the sense of what religion 'is', or in the sense of what religion 'does', both in public and academic discourse. These tensions need to be reflected upon at each stage of an individual study such as this. However, it is also clear that if the term 'religion' itself is contested, then the academic field which specifically seeks to study this contested object must be equally overwhelmed by definitional problems.

### *1.2. What is Religious Studies?*

Unsurprisingly, given the scope for contention over the subject matter 'religion', the academic study of the phenomena, which is usually known in the United Kingdom as the 'Study of Religion' or 'Religious Studies', is equally beset with problems of definition and scope. As my own research is supervised within a setting where a particular religious studies methodology has been central, it is necessary to be aware of both the general background and the specific issues involved in the definition of a field of religious studies. I agree with Eric Sharpe that: 'the present uneasy relationship between the various members of the religious studies families could be greatly illuminated if teachers and students alike were to look up various family trees' (1986: 317). Therefore, having reflected on the general definitional issues around the field of religious studies I shall proceed to outline the 'family tree' of my own institutional setting.

In an overview of the field which, in the 1970s, he understands as *Comparative Religion*, Sharpe provides some background to the academic field of religious studies, as it is now more frequently known. He traces a history of interest in and study of 'other' religions to the times of ancient Greece and Rome. However, it is Max Müller's *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (1873) which Sharpe identifies as the foundation document of comparative religion in the English speaking world (1986: xi). Sharpe considers the early nineteenth century influence of Comte, Hegel and Darwin to have been vital, with the principle of evolution guiding the development of a method of 'Comparative Religion' which experienced its major period of formation in the decade 1859-1869 (1986: 26). During this early phase 'comparative religious studies were pursued by a variety of individual scholars in a number of widely scattered institutions' (1986: 119) with institutional departments only beginning to develop in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The first post in comparative religion in Britain was that of Joseph Estlin Carpenter in 1876 at Manchester College, a Unitarian college then based in London (Ward, 2003: 271). E.B Tylor, who was appointed to the Readership in Anthropology at Oxford University in 1884, was the first full British university post holder studying religion 'as a wholly non-theological discipline' (Ward, 2003: 272). In Europe the development of religious studies was particularly affected by historical philology and evolutionary anthropology, and was tied up from the start with the Christian theology which was also being taught in European universities. In America, where theology remained (and continues to remain) more institutionally separate from the study of religion, Sharpe finds there was a much stronger influence from the field of psychology.

During the twentieth century evolutionary optimism became less popular, especially following the First World War, and a newer tendency developed of 'engaging in close and detailed studies in a limited area rather than in vast comparisons and synthetic pattern-making' (Sharpe, 1986: 174). It was within this context that the phenomenology of religion as a methodology became increasingly prevalent.<sup>9</sup> Phenomenology of religion has had a significant impact on religious studies in the UK, not least through the impact of the first department established as a 'Department of Religious Studies' in

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<sup>9</sup> The 1933 publication of Gerardus van der Leeuw's *Phänomenologie der Religion*, which was translated into English as *Essence and Manifestation* in 1948, is identified by Sharpe as the 'first real milestone in the discipline in its newer form' (1986: 221). However, he identifies Chantepie de la Saussaye as the first scholar to use the term 'phenomenology' in the context of studies of religion, although without philosophical justification, in his 1887 work *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (1986: 222).



1967 at the then, new University of Lancaster under Professor Ninian Smart, 'who became the doyen of the subject in Britain until his death in 2001' (Ward, 2003: 271). Douglas Allen identifies four groups of scholars who use the term phenomenology of religion in subtly different ways. Firstly, Allen identifies those who use the term to mean: 'nothing more than an investigation of the phenomena or observable objects, facts, and events of religion'. Secondly, there are those such as Chantepie de la Saussaye for whom: 'phenomenology of religion means the comparative study and the classification of different types of religious phenomena'. Thirdly, Allen identifies scholars: 'such as W. bede Kristensen, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Joachim Wach, C. Jouco Bleeker, Mircea Eliade, and Jacques Waardenburg, [who] identify phenomenology of religion as a specific branch, discipline, or method within *Religionswissenschaft* or religious studies' (2005: 185).<sup>10</sup> Fourthly, there are those influenced by philosophical phenomenology, either explicitly in the case of Scheler and Ricoeur, partially as in the case of Otto, van der Leeuw, and Eliade, or through theological approaches that utilize phenomenology of religion such as those of Schleiermacher, Tillich and Marion. Such a distinguished list of scholars whose work uses, to some degree or another, the methodology of phenomenology of religion demonstrates the extent to which this methodology has impacted on religious studies.

One of the main contemporary critiques of this phenomenological methodology has come from Gavin Flood who, in *Beyond Phenomenology* (1999), advocates a more critical and reflexive meta-theory through a position which he describes as: 'a recognition of the limits of phenomenology and the necessity of contextualising both phenomena and academic practices within the narratives of their occurrence' (1999: 116). Although recognising the importance of phenomenology in fostering the development of an academic field of religious studies distinct from theology (1999: 9),<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This is not to say they all follow the same programme of phenomenology of religion. Sharpe, writing some time earlier than Allen, distinguishes scholars such as Wach and Eliade from other phenomenology of religion scholars as being part of a German tradition much more inclined to Hermeneutics (1986: 238).

<sup>11</sup> Flood argues that there are three related disciplines. The first being traditional theology or, borrowing a phrase from Anselm, 'faith seeking understanding', the second being contemporary theology which is the study of the traditional form of theology (the study of 'faith seeking understanding'), and the third being phenomenological religious studies which: 'claims not to be naturalistic nor yet religious, but claims to offer objective description of religion' (1999: 29). Unlike traditional theology, both contemporary theology and religious studies: 'stand outside of the narratives upon which they comment and of which they can offer critiques' (1999: 23).

he nevertheless finds the claim of objectivity and ahistoricity in phenomenology to be limiting and fundamentally flawed:

While they have functioned to liberate the study of religions from theological dogmatism, these concepts [bracketing, eidetic reduction, empathy] now unnecessarily limit the range of methodological possibilities within the study of religions; are closed to an open-ended dialogical understanding in which language is central; and disenable an explanatory level that seeks to link 'religious' phenomena to other cultural practices (1999: 93).

Husserlian assumptions about the transcendental ego and an overarching rationality, smuggled in through the Husserlian phenomenological tradition and its phenomenology of consciousness, are found by Flood to be problematic because subjects are always constructed within their particular narratives and within their culture, and because the knowledge of the subject arises within intersubjective networks of communication.

Flood argues that it is not possible to study religion in abstraction from its: 'historical, social and cultural contexts' (1999: 2), and that: 'the construction of "world religions" is underpinned by a certain kind of theorizing whose roots are in the Enlightenment and which seeks universals' (1999: 3). Although in other fields of academic research the post-modern need to look to context and challenge universals may appear self evident, it is not necessarily the case in traditional, phenomenologically based religious studies, in which, as Flood among others (Fitzgerald, 2000; McCutcheon, 1997, 2003) points out, there has been limited engagement with theoretical debates in the social sciences and humanities.

Flood seeks to defend a position which he defines as 'soft relativism' or fallibilism. This position: 'accepts indeterminacy, that knowledge about religion cannot be grounded on certainty, and that this indeterminacy allows for a dialogical process in which the research programme, through focussing on language, is constantly open to the further possibilities of its dialogical object' (1999: 68). Using the hermeneutic or narrativist tradition of Ricoeur, and the dialogism of Bakhtin, Flood advocates instead a dialogical and situated model of inquiry which focuses on (historically contingent) language and culture: 'the realm of signs', which is dialogical and interactive, and which he argues: 'fosters rigour in analysis, reflexivity, and critique' (1999: 7).

It is frustrating that Flood does not provide examples of what the phenomenological method he describes, or indeed his preferred 'soft relativism', actually looks like in



terms of specific studies.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as Allen's long list of scholars indicates, there is the potential for a huge range of applications of the methodology. Although the phenomenology of religion in its traditional, late nineteenth century form may well be insufficient to the needs of the present academic milieu, it is not accurate to characterise all phenomenological studies as not having moved beyond this. As Allen points out:

...one can submit that Flood greatly exaggerates the impact of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology on the study of religion, and that most critiques of phenomenology and the anti-phenomenological features he formulates can be found within later developments of philosophical phenomenology and phenomenology of religion (2005: 204).

In general, the contemporary issue in the nature of religious studies appears to be the balance between theory and empirical 'description'. While Flood treads a middle ground between the traditional phenomenological school, and the theory driven rejection of empiricism of McCutcheon (2003), or Fitzgerald's (2000) rejection of an object 'religion' to be studied, others also find a point somewhere along this continuum at which to place their understanding of religious studies. Steven Sutcliffe, for example, takes a position which is inclined towards the importance of description, a position he describes as 'qualitative empirical' (2004: xxiv) or 'realistic' (1998). He argues that: 'To 'de-cribe' is implicitly to theorize' (2004: xxv), and that working inductively and empirically counteracts: 'an entrenched tendency in studies of religion, both naturalistic and theological, to idealize or normativize religion: that is, to subject particular historical instances of practice to abstracted typologies of various kinds' (2004: xxv-xxvi). Sutcliffe clearly sees 'religion', as the object of study for religious studies, as a social, cultural and historical formation rather than the ahistorical essence that theologians might recognise.

Clearly, the extent to which religious studies is differently understood has the potential to undermine any sense of a common or shared field. I agree with James Thrower that:

To argue for, and still worse to seek to impose, as so many professionally engaged in the study of religions have done in the past, a single problematic and a single methodology for the study of religions is profoundly mistaken (1999: 94).

However, I consider that religious studies can be, and usually is, understood as a multi-disciplinary field, drawing on a long and diverse methodological history, where scholars

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<sup>12</sup> This issue of the link between theory and practice is problematic in much of the debate about the field of religious studies. Although some scholars, such as Fitzgerald, do cite examples of specific research projects, many do not, and even these citations can be controversial, as is seen in the online debate between Fitzgerald and Ian Reader (Fitzgerald, 2004; Reader, 2004).



reflexively balance theory and empiricism while giving due attention to the border between theology and religious studies. There is no single way to 'do' religious studies and a variety of factors influence the form that any one study takes. The particular setting in which I find myself at the University of Leeds is one important factor in the nature of this particular study.

### *1.3. The Institutional Particularities of this Study*

As the foregoing section has illustrated, the description and definition of what constitutes religious studies is neither straightforward nor agreed, however, some characteristics can be identified. For example:

The academic study of religion can be characterized as follows: 1) it is a composite field of study; 2) it is based on a methodological pluralism; 3) it is influenced by specializations and local institutional and cultural traditions; and 4) it is caught in a web of epistemological tensions (Geertz & McCutcheon, 2000: 4).

Some of the epistemological tensions, composite field and methodological pluralism which impact on this study have already been indicated in the preceding discussion. The question of what 'is' religion has been shown to be highly problematic, and the tension between theology and religious studies, the impact of the social sciences, and the pursuit of reflexivity will be shown, below, to have impacted to a greater or lesser degree on this study.

To return to Sharpe's previously quoted comment that students of religious studies should: 'look up various family trees' the 'specializations and local institutional and cultural traditions' at the University of Leeds where the study has been supervised require further explication at this point.<sup>13</sup> As Sharpe notes (1986: 288), the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Leeds was one of only three centres for the subject in the 1950s and early 1960s. Founded in the 1940s, the first professor of the department, which has always been of both theology and religious studies, was the anthropologist of religion E. O. James (Department of Theology and Religious Studies, 2007). Despite, therefore, the presence of both theology and religious studies, the social scientific approaches to religion have been significant from the start. As a result of the history of higher education in the UK, many departments were originally departments of theology to which religious studies has been added to keep pace with changing tastes

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that several writers so far mentioned are linked via an institution, Nye, Flood and Fitzgerald all having links to the University of Stirling.

and demographics. At Leeds, the two aspects to the study of religion have developed alongside one another, a dimension which is considered important. The departmental website states:

It has always been a department of both Religious Studies and Theology, as is reflected in its title. The balance is important (Department of Theology and Religious Studies, 2007).

Although, as we shall see, some scholars would prefer the complete institutional separation of theology and religious studies this is not a popular model in the UK because, as Ford argues: 'it is healthier for the field in universities to have the diversity of theology and religious studies in constant interaction' (1998: 5). For over thirty years the department at Leeds has, through the Community Religions Project, had a focus on research of the local, and of ethnic minority communities.

Since 1976, the Community Religions Project (CRP) has conducted empirical research on religion and religions 'near at hand' in the cities of Leeds and Bradford and beyond (Department of Theology and Religious Studies: Institute for Religion and Public Life, 2007).

This originally informal research group was formed by Michael Pye, Ursula King and William Weaver.<sup>14</sup> Pye, writing in 1976, described its original purposes as:

...to carry out and publish research into the religious communities of Leeds and neighbouring cities, and to relate such research to associated matters such as community relations, inter-religious understanding, religious education, and teaching programmes within the University' (quoted in Knott, 2004: 68).

One of the primary contemporary figures in the CRP, its Director, Kim Knott, described the social scientific approach taken by this project:

The orientation of my own work and that of others involved in the Community Religions Project does not differ from that of many other scholars in the study of religion who adopt a 'scientific' approach, though, of necessity, we focus on contemporary religious expressions and use social scientific methods rather than engaging primarily in historical analyses (1992: 8).

Now forming a part of the department's Institute for Religion and Public Life, the CRP has developed a focus on: 'research and consultancy in relation to the rising profile of religion in diversity training and 'community cohesion' policy' (Department of Theology and Religious Studies: Institute for Religion and Public Life, 2007) which demonstrates, in part, how the public and policy making agenda has been increasingly concerned with the issues of ethnicity and religion.

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<sup>14</sup> Pye had formally been a colleague of Ninian Smart at Lancaster.



The dynamics of my own academic institution clearly relate to this particular study. Having followed a taught MA course in the department, and then acting as research assistant for one of the CRP's research projects related to public policy (Knott, McLoughlin, & Prideaux, 2003), I have adopted this general inclination toward local, small scale, contemporary, ethnographic studies that are comfortable in interaction with theology and cognisant of the public policy debates surrounding ethnicity and religion.

#### *1.4. The Impact of the Social Sciences*

As is already clear, through reference to scholars such as Asad and Mellor, the impact of the social sciences on the field of religious studies has been profound.<sup>15</sup> Sharpe shows how in particular the field of anthropology, especially through the study of folklore, developed alongside the study of religion in the nineteenth century, and that studies of this time effectively combined anthropological data and religious speculation (1986: 50). However, this was not a tradition which was maintained and Sharpe also claims that in the 1960s: 'the social sciences were only marginally interested in religion ... since 'religious' behaviour is simply human behaviour operating in peculiarly defined communities' (1986: 306), and that those involved in the field of comparative religion demonstrated little interest in the fields of sociology and anthropology. Yet Sharpe detected a shift during the 1970s towards a greater awareness of the social sciences, evidenced by the increase in the level of methodological discussion in religious studies, which he believes is a result of turning towards the social sciences, whose scholars: 'will always have a high level of commitment to methodology, and may indeed become obsessive on the subject' (1986: 308).

The different disciplines within the social sciences have different implications for religious studies: anthropology and sociology perhaps being the most significant. However, human geography is of increasing importance with the use of spatial analysis being adopted in studies of religion (e.g. Knott, 2005b). Spatial analysis will be used in chapter four, when looking at the local context, as a tool for interrogating the spatial location in more detail. Anthropology and sociology have, however, been significant for religious studies since the field began to develop. Anthropology has taken a long interest in local religious phenomena, and has produced many studies which provide

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<sup>15</sup> The social sciences can be considered to be those disciplines which study human aspects of the world, generally emphasizing some form of either qualitative or quantitative scientific methodologies. Disciplines include anthropology and sociology as well as fields of study such as gender and cultural studies.



both data and theoretical reflection for religious studies. Sociology, with its tendency towards greater breadth and theoretical development has provided for religious studies some of the important historical and contemporary commentators on the nature and future of religion. As Sharpe indicates, anthropologists such as Mary Douglas and Clifford Geertz, and sociologists including Peter Berger and Bryan Wilson, are key figures in the academic landscape of religious studies. Even basic guides to religious studies will invariably include extensive sections on the anthropology and sociology of religion (e.g. Bond, Kunin, & Murphy, 2003; Hinnells, 2005). It is unsurprising therefore, that the anthropological method of ethnography, and other social scientific methodologies, has had such importance in the field of religious studies.

As with my earlier comments in relation to the definition of religion, the possible ground to cover in surveying the full breadth of the social scientific impact on religious studies is beyond the scope of this study, however, it is useful to provide one particular example because of its salience for the whole of this thesis. In Gerd Baumann's *Contesting Culture* (1996) he provides an ethnographic account of Southall, West London which explores the nature of identity. Rather than studying only one ethnic community Baumann treats the local area as a whole and as a result develops his very important distinction between demotic and dominant discourses of community, and the reified discourse of culture.<sup>16</sup> He finds that:

Southall culture entails a dual discursive competence, embracing the dominant as well as the demotic, and it is the dominant that emphasizes the conservation of existing *communities* and the demotic that allows Southallians to re-conceive *community* boundaries and contest the meaning of *culture*. These contestations, however, tend to stop short of taking one final step: the word *culture* remains restricted, in many contexts, to its reified meaning (1996: 195).<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, this distinction is important for religious studies, especially when the word 'culture' is understood as having parallels in usage and intention with the word 'religion'. Baumann's identification of the way in which culture is used to legitimate community, and is therefore not used as 'an idea equally negotiable and processual as *community*' (1996: 196), has implications for the possible ways in which religion, as a

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<sup>16</sup> Baumann's distinctions between dominant and demotic discourses of community have parallels with Moscovici's distinction between consensual and reified universes in his theory of social representations in the field of social psychology (2001: 33). Neither author references the other. Although an interesting note, the issue of similar theories emerging in different academic disciplines is not one which I can pursue within the constraints of this study.

<sup>17</sup> Italics in original to denote how the words *community* and *culture* are used in the demotic discourse, rather than their technically understood definitions.



restricted, reified term, might be understood within communities.<sup>18</sup> Unavoidably, Baumann does deal with the way in which religion was used in Southall, especially given the existence of five ‘seemingly self-evident *communities of culture*’ (1996: 188-189) which included a Sikh, Hindu and Muslim community. Baumann traces how the dominant discursive equation of culture with religious or ethnic community is differently disengaged within each of these religious-defined communities. Baumann’s comments on leadership and inter-faith networks as well as the more important conclusions regarding community and culture will be returned to at various points during the course of this study.

It is here worth noting a more general point about the influence of the social sciences on religious studies, and that is how, in the social sciences, the study of religion is clearly disconnected from any analysis or concern with the theological, existential or metaphysical truth claims of religions. Although Baumann for instance refers to these issues in his comments on inter-faith networks (1996: 173-178), they are peripheral to his central concern with religion, namely how it functions discursively in the arena of community. Mellor’s sociological work, mentioned earlier, is unusual in being theologically informed, referring to the theological realists as well as to the work of theologians such as Rowan Williams. That his approach is unusual indicates the extent to which the social sciences separate the theological content of religion from the ‘work it does’ in communities and cultures. This separation of religion as a social factor and religion as a spiritual connectedness is vital to the arguments to which we now turn: those surrounding the distinction between the academic subject areas of theology and religious studies.

### *1.5. The sensitive border between Theology and Religious Studies*

The borderlands between theology and religious studies are both contested and unclear. The preceding sections provide the background for the debate. What ‘religion’ is understood to be, what a religious studies methodology and meta-theory might look like, and the degree to which the social sciences have impacted on the field are all significant to how theology and religious studies relate to one another. One of the most important underlying issues for religious studies is the degree to which either social scientific or theological approaches appear to: ‘prejudge the nature of that reality

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<sup>18</sup> As discussed in chapter eight the word religion, or more commonly ‘faith community’, is a factor of the dominant discourse which the demotic discourse of community and culture seeks to protect because it legitimates, among other things, access to funding streams.



[presupposed by religion] from the outset' (Thrower, 1999: 91). Thrower argues that the phenomenological methodology was an attempt to deal with the two supposed extremes of firstly the social scientists or those taking an empirical approach who may appear to assume as scholars, if not as individuals, that there is no transcendental truth to religion; and secondly the theologians who assume that there is a transcendental truth to religion. This is a distinction which causes friction and mistrust, as can be seen in the comments of Bruce Lincoln:

Although critical inquiry has become commonplace in other disciplines, it still offends many students of religion, who denounce it as "reductionism". This charge is meant to silence critique. The failure to treat religion "as religion" – that is, the refusal to ratify its claim of transcendent nature and sacrosanct status – may be regarded as heresy and sacrilege by those who construct themselves as religious, but it is the starting point for those who construct themselves as historians (2005: 10).<sup>19</sup>

Scholars of religious studies have had many decades to deal with this issue, but it is still controversial, indicating the extent to which the problem is both deeply entrenched and also potentially insoluble. In the UK the problem has its most acute expression in the way in which University departments are described. The administrative rubric recognises the subject area as Theology and Religious Studies. With some scholars on both sides antipathetical to one another's position, it is hardly surprising that this continues to be such a contested relationship.

In his critique of phenomenology as a religious studies methodology, discussed above, Flood identified traditional theology, contemporary theology and religious studies as three separate though related enterprises (1999: 19-24). In his 2006 article *Reflections on Tradition and Inquiry in the Study of Religions*, Flood develops this delineation between the two types of theology and religious studies towards seeing them as orders of discourse. First order discourse is the tradition itself, outside any academic enterprise, and prior to traditional theology. Second order discourse is the reflection of traditional theology, such as Christian theology, upon itself. Third order discourse such as religious studies and some forms of 'contemporary' theology: 'is a form of reasoning about first- and second-order discourses and is implicitly if not explicitly comparative' (Flood, 2006: 55). Flood goes on to argue that the third order discourse of religious studies can become an arena for encounter between traditions (2006: 56), and also suggests that

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<sup>19</sup> Lincoln, and his colleague McCutcheon are both academics within the American system, where religious studies is known as 'History of Religions'.



religious studies can become the forum through which theology is 'voiced' to the world (2006: 48). According to Flood, religious studies will be reinvigorated and better informed through this inclusion of third-order theology, and some second-order theology, although theology must submit to the standards of rational discourse (2006: 56).

Nancy Levene, in responding to Flood's article, is concerned that the privileging of theology as of significant importance for the future of religious studies polarizes the terms. She sees no reason to either exclude theology, or celebrate its arrival, in the field of religious studies, arguing that: 'One could outlaw it, but it would always be unclear just what one was outlawing and too costly to police the shifting borders' (2006: 61). Her principal conclusion however is that by making theology somehow necessary to the future of religious studies: 'it gives the discourse of theology grossly disproportionate power for reasons that are almost entirely defensive' (2006: 62). I agree with Levene, in that I see theology as unavoidably part of the field of religious studies, and I do not agree with the implication of Flood that religious studies can in some way do the work of theology by assisting it to bring its texts and arguments into public discourse. What is principally at issue, in my opinion, is the distinction between theology as 'faith seeking understanding' and theology as the study of this seeking. Religious studies should not, and could not, be concerned with 'faith seeking understanding', indeed, Flood does not argue that it should be. As a non-confessional area of study the student should not be assumed to be party to the theological world view that is being studied, or to sympathise with the ideals and intentions of religion in general or of particular religions. However, theology as the study, interpretation and understanding of the theological world view, Flood's third order discourse, is both accessible to those from other traditions, and is unavoidably part of the work of religious studies. Without the voices of the first order discourse there would be no subject matter for religious studies, and it is only through theology, in its second and third order form, that we can hear and understand some of these voices. To understand a statement of faith as a purely psychological or political statement for instance is, in my opinion, to unjustifiably bracket the intended theological content of the statement. These psychological or political interpretations may be of use in building up a complete picture of what is happening when a statement of faith is made, but they are not of themselves a complete picture, if indeed a complete picture is ever possible. However, to give equal weight to the theological statements of those being researched is not the same as to assume that there is some a-priori truth

behind these statements, or that the theological is more important than the political, psychological, or any other points of interest.

In my own study I am concerned with both theology and religious studies, and the boundary between the two is not, as Levene points out, easy to police. It would be possible to interpret data purely politically or psychologically, but for the respondents there is an important theological level of engagement with the questions and issues, and importantly with the religious 'other'. This is significant for my study, and I use these statements to challenge the relevance of traditional theology of inter-faith dialogue for religiously diverse neighbourhoods. By taking this step of interacting with theology as an enterprise of the religious believer, as well as of the academic world, I am consciously taking a step which Fitzgerald (2000) and McCutcheon (1997, 2003) consider beyond the bounds of academic religious studies. This study is probably an example of what, for Fitzgerald, is one of the major criticisms of religious studies as a separate field of study, that it is in fact nothing more than a disguised, liberal, ecumenical theology:

...ecumenical liberal theology has been disguised (though not very well) in the so-called scientific study of religion, which denies that it is a form of theology and at the same time claims that it is irreducible to sociology either (Fitzgerald, 2000: 7).

Unlike Fitzgerald's caricature of religious studies as disguised theology, I take a more positive view of religious studies *because* of its relationship to theology, following in many ways, though not entirely, Flood's argument. This is not to go as far as David Ford, who has controversially argued that: 'theology and religious studies is divinely involving' (1998: 10). Although Ford makes many excellent points,<sup>20</sup> to overtly accept God as an involved party in an academic field is to travel too far towards blurring the lines between the two disciplines, lines that Ford argues can never be anything but blurred. Again, as with discussions about the nature of religious studies, there appears to be a continuum over the question of the relationship between theology and religious studies between those like Ford who consider them unavoidably involved, and those like McCutcheon, Fitzgerald and Sutcliffe, who consider them completely different enterprises.<sup>21</sup> Along this continuum are a variety of degrees to which scholars are

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<sup>20</sup> For example, that we never just write about religion, but are also personally involved in accepting or rejecting religion (1998: 5).

<sup>21</sup> Sutcliffe uses the analogy of cartography and geography to illustrate how religious studies and theology are completely independent enterprises, cartography making the geography of a land



willing to accept the link between theology and religious studies, with Flood and Levene exemplifying the degree of contention even at fairly close points on the continuum.

Although the debate about the relationship between theology and religious studies is both interesting and of general significance to the field of religious studies, it is not a debate with which I will, or can, fully engage in my own study. However, it is not a debate which needs resolving in order for my study to proceed theoretically intact. This sort of debate may not be amenable to a resolution that is satisfactory to all parties but as Clive Seale suggests (1999: 15), the debate functions to sensitize those working in the field of religious studies to problematic issues that may be inherent in the methodological framework. Unlike McCutcheon's traditional picture of religious studies as concerned with myth, ritual and symbol, and Flood's concern with traditional phenomenology, my study does not seek to explain the origin of religion, or even the myths, rituals and symbols associated with it: but is instead concerned with the way religion impacts on communities and identity. It is therefore the work of religion, rather than religion itself, which is the object of my study. The impact of the social sciences on the field of religious studies, as explored above, is therefore critical to this thesis.

This theoretical and methodological context has demonstrated both the complexity and problems of the field of religious studies, but has also unpacked some of the key issues that influence the form and content of this study. In demonstrating where this study is placed in the broad and varied field of religious studies, this section is important in both contextualising and validating the approach taken. Using these considerations as a framework, it is now necessary to move on to mapping the religious context for this study, in terms of the history and contemporary theories of Christian-Muslim dialogue and inter-faith dialogue more broadly.

## Chapter 2: The Context of Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Encounter

Many of the issues identified in my research findings relate to how Christians and Muslims understand their religion in relationship to the 'other' faith they find in their local environment. Alongside this demotic understanding of what it is to be a person of faith in dialogue with the 'other', there is a dominant discourse of inter-faith dialogue which informs religious leaders and academics, but can appear to be at a distance to the lived reality of inter-faith dialogue in communities. In this chapter a brief overview of some types of inter-faith dialogue and features of the historical contact between Muslims and Christians will situate the contemporary issues in, and theories of, Muslim-Christian dialogue.

### *2.1. Types of Muslim-Christian Dialogue*

The enterprise of inter-faith dialogue has never been an easy to identify, unchanging activity.<sup>22</sup> There are a variety of ways of delineating the different forms and types,<sup>23</sup> and a variety of issues which influence the form and outcome of dialogue.<sup>24</sup> The focus of this chapter is the specific nature of Muslim-Christian dialogue. However, more general perspectives on inter-faith dialogue will be of relevance throughout this section. I shall highlight two distinct forms of dialogue, formal and informal, as well as my own delineation of five types of dialogue; the theological, mystical, practical, ethical and 'living' dialogue. Formal dialogue is limited in time and space, is most often conducted by representatives or leaders and is outcome orientated. Informal dialogue tends to occur outside the temporal and spatial limitations of formal dialogue, for instance the conference. Informal dialogue may include anybody and is orientated towards the process, usually of conversation. Formal dialogue is the dominant expression and understanding of inter-faith dialogue. Informal dialogue is seen as a useful precursor

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<sup>22</sup> The term inter-faith is used interchangeably with inter-religious (and is variously written as interfaith, inter-faith, and inter faith). Inter-faith appears to suggest a more personal level of relationship, whereas inter-religious suggests the relationship between the traditions rather than the individuals (Barnes S.J., 2002: 3). The term 'inter-faith' will be used in this study; where a distinction is implied or required between inter-personal or inter-traditional relationships this will be made clear in the text.

<sup>23</sup> For example, in Roman Catholic documents there is a separation between the dialogue of theological exchange, dialogue of life, dialogue of action and dialogue of religious experience (Barnes S.J., 2002: 21). More practically orientated, Phillippe Gaudin (2007) distinguishes between inter-faith dialogue as an activity of religions interacting and cross fertilizing both internally and with other religions, inter-faith dialogue as communication between persons of different religions, and inter-faith dialogue as promotion of religious knowledge.

<sup>24</sup> Not least among these are the: 'theological presuppositions and existential situation' (Zebiri, 1997:36) of those taking part in dialogue activities.

and addition to formal dialogue, but is rarely considered to have merit in and of itself, despite its implications for individuals and communities.

### *Theological*

The dialogue of the theologian, or historian, is most explicitly the dialogue of texts rather than communities (Prideaux, 2002), and is a formal level of dialogue, although participants will usually also be involved in informal dialogue. There are a number of scholarly discourses about theological and historical issues and mutual perceptions between the two faiths, as well as texts which trace the encounter and dialogue between Muslims and Christians.<sup>25</sup> There is also a body of particularly Christian literature, explored below in section 2.4, which seeks to provide a theological response to religious diversity. The objectives of the study and practice of theological dialogue are often concerned with theorising difference, recording and analysing the history of dialogue, and comparing text and practice. Throughout this chapter it is theological and historical texts which provide the main literature for review, as these are the main textual resource in this area, indicating the extent to which the study of Muslim-Christian dialogue is dominated by this perspective. The dialogue of the academic and theologian, the dialogue of texts, does not necessarily seek to impact on or relate to communities, and in many senses becomes, as an academic exercise, an end in itself. However, this textual dialogue could theoretically have a significant impact on other forms of dialogue, providing part of the framework from which those involved in other forms of dialogue define themselves and understand the other faith.

### *Mystical*

Muslim-Christian dialogue has the potential, as in other forms of inter-faith dialogue, to become an act of faith in itself. Mystical dialogue can be informal, between friends, or formal, for instance at some types of inter-faith group meetings, and the objective is personal transformation. Theologians such as John Hick and Hasan Askari (1985) and Raimundo Panikkar (1978) would claim that true dialogue only occurs when the participant is involved in a personal, spiritual and even mystical sense with the dialogue. This approach to dialogue, which may or may not relate to such activities as shared

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<sup>25</sup> For example, Barnes (2002), D'Costa (1990), Goddard (1995, 2000b), Johnstone (1985), Race and Shafer (2002), Waardenburg (2003), Watt (1991) and Wiles (1992). Significantly, the major theologians and historians of dialogue are writing from a western, if not an overtly Christian, perspective. Although Muslim academics such as Atullah Siddiqui (1997) and Tariq Ramadan (2006) are beginning to make an impression on the field, there continues to be a relative lack of Muslim writing about dialogue. Reasons for this are explored below in section 2.3.



worship, is deeply problematic within the Muslim-Christian encounter because of the apparent potential for syncretism.<sup>26</sup> It is not possible here to explore the significance of the mystical dialogue of religious experience in Muslim-Christian encounter, but the presence of this strand of thought and practice must nevertheless be recognised in order to provide the fullest picture of the varieties of dialogue.

### *Practical*

The dialogue of the practical tends to be the dialogue of necessity. In this form of dialogue participants seek to respond, usually but not exclusively at a formal level, to the world in which the dialogue occurs. This dialogue addresses social, economic, political or religious issues considered fundamental to participants and most likely to be resolved by co-working. It is this form of dialogue which most directly relates to the presence of religion in the public square, as addressed below in chapter eight. Practical dialogue can be very local as in Faith Together in Leeds 11; it can be national, as in the activities of the Inter Faith Network for the UK;<sup>27</sup> or practical dialogue can be international as in conferences dealing with the issues of religious minorities, or of mission and *da'wah* as in for example the Chambesy Dialogue Consultation (1976). At a formal level this form of dialogue seeks to directly impact on the community and is the form of dialogue most likely to provide positive results for local communities in terms of practical outcomes. Although often requiring a theological basis, practical dialogue between Muslims and Christians can be quite separate from all but the most basic of theological reflection.

As will be seen from the research findings, practical dialogue as demonstrated by Faith Together in Leeds 11 can have significant implications for, and overlap with, informal 'living' dialogue. Practical dialogue can therefore bridge the gulf between demotic and dominant discourses of dialogue. Practical dialogue, and the informal dialogue which can accompany it, has a significant impact on demotic theological understandings, although dominant theological discourses rarely recognise this.

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<sup>26</sup> Although this is a criticism which Panikkar and others overtly reject (1978: 4).

<sup>27</sup> The Inter Faith Network for the UK supports local inter-faith work, produces a directory of faiths in the UK and organises seminars and programmes to consult on and explore issues such as religious education in schools and the role of faith communities in public life (Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2007a).

*Ethical*

Ethical dialogue is one type of formal, practical dialogue, which seeks the creation of a common platform between religions on ethical issues. The search for a 'Global Ethic' which is shared by all faiths was the focus of the 1993 Chicago Parliament of the World's Religions, and has its leading scholarly proponent in Hans Küng (1991, 1993). The relationship between inter-faith dialogue and the attempt to formulate a global ethics, or even a stance on any particular ethical issue, is not a straightforward one. Emilio Platti for example argues for the need to accept: 'the obligation to be intolerant in the ethical dimension of religion' (2006: 45), as there are areas of religious practice which may be considered unethical by others and may create barriers to, rather than the basis of, inter-faith dialogue. It can also be argued that it is at the level of intra-religious rather than inter-religious dialogue that the main issues in ethics are to be found:

There are in all religious traditions, in addition to profound and vital resources, real obstacles to dealing with the world's social, political, and environmental crises, but these obstacles cannot be dismantled by outsiders (McCarthy, 1998: 111).

Ethical dialogue, as with other forms of practical dialogue, relates to political issues such as justice and democracy (e.g. Race & Shafer, 2002). Whereas many forms of practical dialogue relate to local political matters such as service provision, ethical dialogue is more likely to relate to national and even international political themes such as war and peace.

*'Living' Dialogue*

'Living' dialogue is definitively informal and takes place in the everyday experience of living, working or studying in a religiously diverse environment. Living dialogue is available to all people who encounter others conscious of their own faith and willing to be 'in dialogue'; to communicate with the 'other'. As such, it has a constituency which includes vastly more people than the traditionally understood domain of inter-faith dialogue, the scholarly study and conference. People of faith come into contact with one another through the workplace, shop, community centre and innumerable other religiously neutral places, as well as the more expected places of meetings and conferences. Initial encounters, often around practical necessity, though not exclusively so, lead to conversation, which is the most obvious form of dialogue. Those involved in formal dialogues, such as theological or political conferences often also take part in informal dialogue 'between sessions' where this living dialogue occurs. Individuals

involved in this informal living dialogue are in a situation where their religious identity is one among many different identities, such as pupil, employee or resident. As such, it is possible for religious identity to never become a key element in dialogue. However, where the religious identity becomes significant, living dialogue can have a key formative impact on the development of personal theologies and attitudes to other religions.<sup>28</sup>

Historically, this form of dialogue has not been given a high status, and is infrequently mentioned in the histories of encounter and dialogue. The reasons for this are many. Firstly, members of Muslim and Christian communities have rarely had the opportunity to regularly interact. The history of encounter and dialogue focuses on the encounter between states rather than people because this has been the dominant, and most often recorded, form of encounter.<sup>29</sup> It is also particularly difficult to study a form of dialogue which, by its nature, is transient, brief and often personal. There are rarely clear objectives in this type of dialogue, or even recognisable outcomes. However, it is the contention of this study that living dialogue is the most significant form of dialogue for the majority of Muslims and Christians living together in a religiously diverse state, such as the UK. This was also the conclusion of Joseph Kenny, reflecting on the experience of Nigeria, where he found a considerable amount of dialogue between 'ordinary people' based on practical necessity.<sup>30</sup> As Kenny states:

While a limited amount of dialogue has been going on among intellectuals and university people, a great amount of practical dialogue goes on among the ordinary people in their daily lives. Most ordinary people are defensive about their religion, if only because it marks them off in a social category. Yet when they are in a situation where they must share their lives and work, they quickly make practical accommodations, without any guiding principles, in all sorts of matters affecting religion. Intellectual leaders are often unaware of the day to day interaction of Muslims and Christians, and the theoretical knowledge they have which could guide the people does not reach them (1985: 125).

As will be seen in chapter nine, this is an experience replicated in Beeston Hill. It is an experience which provides one of the main conclusions for this thesis: theological

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<sup>28</sup> Goddard finds this to be the case with Muslim writers who have a positive response to Christianity, many of them have Christian friends (1996: 173). Equally, the Roman Catholic theologian Robert Caspar (1991) is an example of a Christian writer whose personal theology was significantly affected by living among Muslims.

<sup>29</sup> Some historical studies do provide insight into the lives of 'ordinary people' e.g. Dajani-Shakeel (1995) and Little (1995).

<sup>30</sup> Kenny uses the phrase 'practical dialogue' to refer to a range of activities that I would define as both practical and living dialogue.



studies of inter-faith relations do not impact on the lived realities of religiously diverse neighbourhoods, where arguably they should be of primary importance.

## *2.2. Features in the History of Muslim-Christian Encounter*

Having outlined some of the forms that inter-faith dialogue can take, it is now appropriate to offer an overview of some of the features in the history of encounter between Muslims and Christians. Although many of these encounters can be characterised as dialogue under the very broad definition I am using, many of the encounters are purely textual or political and, as will become clear, religion is often a coincidental rather than central issue. Historical factors can have both positive and negative influences on contemporary relationships between faiths, providing a resource of experience and imagery which can be drawn on to both support and oppose dialogue.<sup>31</sup>

During the early history of Islam, when the Qur'an and the Hadith were recorded, the key teachings of Islam regarding Christianity were laid down. These continue to affect how Muslims understand Christians and Christianity. At the time of Muhammad Christianity had been in existence for some 600 years. A wide range of scriptural responses, theological perspectives and historical experiences could be brought to bear in responding to the new and emerging religion of Islam. Although these became important over the coming centuries, at the time of Muhammad there was relatively limited contact between the main geographical areas of Christian populations and the new Islam of Arabia. At this very early stage Islam was not seen by the Christian Byzantium as a general political, military or theological threat.

Muhammad's own religious background can not be demonstrated from the earliest sources, and there is little knowledge of the religious culture in Mecca at the time of his birth (Peters, 1994: 260). Christianity in Arabia around 600CE was primarily Monophysite and Nestorian,<sup>32</sup> influenced by the Byzantine Empire to the northwest and the Sassanian Empire to the northeast. Some Arabian tribes had adopted Christianity although this can be understood as a 'statement of cultural affinity and a marker of

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<sup>31</sup> Transliteration from the Arabic is in the simplest form possible, omitting diacritical marks unless commonly used. Dates are given in the 'common era'.

<sup>32</sup> The Monophysite and Nestorian church were at a geographical and theological distance from the main body of Christian thought and practice. Their Christology particularly would be considered heretical by many other Christians, both then and now (Goddard, 1996: 14; Watt, 1991).

political allegiance' (Goddard, 2000b: 15) rather than a result of religious conviction. For many of these Christian populations this was an Arab Christianity but not an Arabic Christianity (Peters, 1994: 67), the language of worship and scriptures being Syriac, the same Christian Aramaic dialect from which many loan words occur in the Qur'an when referring to Christian terms. Without an Arabic translation of the Bible, ordinary Christian Arabs probably had little detailed knowledge of their religion (Watt, 1991: 6). Despite this Christian presence in Arabia there is little evidence of any significant Christian influence in Hijaz, the western side of the peninsula where Muhammad was born (Peters, 1994: 1). As a result, the extent and existence of Christian influence in the time of Muhammad is a matter of some controversy (Goddard, 2000b: 19).<sup>33</sup>

Ibn Ishaq (d. 767), the main traditional biographical source (*sira*) for the life of Muhammad, identifies five main instances of Muhammad's direct encounter with Christianity (Goddard, 2000b: 19-22). There are two which could be described as personal to Muhammad: an instance of a Christian monk identifying the child Muhammad as a prophet, and a Christian relative being the first to reassure him of the truth of his revelations. Two further instances recorded by Ibn Ishaq are of Muhammad being in diplomatic contact with Christians. A Christian delegation to Medina in 628/7 was involved in a lengthy theological debate with Muhammad, and towards the end of his life letters were sent to the rulers of states bordering Arabia calling on them to accept Islam as their religion. The fifth instance Ibn Ishaq records is not directly between Muhammad and Christians but was of direct significance during his lifetime. A delegation sent to recall a group of Muslims who migrated to Axum in 615 were involved in conversation with the Negus (ruler) of Axum which resulted, it is reported by Ibn Ishaq, in his tearful declaration that the teachings of Jesus and of the Qur'an were 'from the same niche' (Goddard, 2000b: 21).

The historical development of these incidents, from sending a Muslim delegation to the Christian Negus in 615, to receiving a Christian delegation in 628, demonstrates the

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<sup>33</sup> The relationship between Christianity and Islam at this time was also affected by contact between Islam and Judaism. Indeed, it has been argued that Muhammad almost certainly had more contact with Jews (Goddard, 1996: 15). The Jewish community was significantly larger than the Christian community in Arabia, and in the Constitution of Medina it was necessary to provide a basis for co-existence of the two communities. This provided a tolerant and accepting response to the Jewish community that was not always evident, for example during the capture of and agreement about Khaybar (628/7).



developing influence of Islam during these early years. It can be argued that the Qur'anic message shows a development of approach and response to Christianity which mirrors the changing experience of contact with the Christian community. Earlier statements in the Qur'an such as surahs 5:82-3, 2:62, 3:55, 3:199, 5:66, 28:52-5, 57:27 are positive about the Christian community, when there was still the expectation that Christians would follow the Prophet (Goddard, 2000b: 25, following Waardenburg). As it became clear that there was not going to be a universal acceptance more negative verses, such as surahs 5:72, 5:73 and 9:29, can be found (McAuliffe, 1991).

In the period post-Qur'an the needs of a growing Muslim kingdom, and thus growing contact with Christians, led to the development of a more detailed response to Christianity. The Hadith, for example, contain more evidence of knowledge of Christianity, as well as the sayings of Jesus (Goddard, 1996: 17). Under the caliphate of 'Umar (d. 644) between 634 and 644 Muslims were in contact with a greater Christian population in the newly conquered lands of Syria, Egypt and Iraq, and there was a shift in writing from a concentration on polemic towards a concentration on accommodation. Both polemic and accommodation required an elaboration of teachings from the Qur'an:

...when Muslim scholars elaborated the Qur'anic perception of Christianity, they were making an initial response to the needs of Muslims living intermingled with Christians (Watt, 1991: 59).

The need for practical solutions to an Empire which contained adherents of other religions led to the development of the concept of protected minorities (*dhimmis*), for the 'Peoples of the Book', including the Christian and Jewish communities, under Muslim control. This required the payment of a *jizya*, a separate tax for non-Muslims, and exclusion from serving in the army. Although the system, as applied in the modern world, is not without its critics (Nazir-Ali, 2006: 68), for its time it was a practical solution to a significant problem.

The first major inter-personal disputations occurred between Christians and Muslims during the caliphate of 'Umar (Watt, 1991: 30). These continued with notable discourses such as those between Catholicos Timothy (d. 823) and Caliph al-Mahdi (d. 785) in 781 (Goddard, 2000a: 196; Sirry, 2005: 365; Watt, 1991: 63). It is more appropriate to describe these conversations as disputations, rather than dialogues, as the form they took was of a different nature to what would today be considered inter-faith

dialogue, with the Caliph asking questions on solely philosophical rather than personal issues of faith, and Timothy replying (Watt, 1991: 64).

Wadi Haddad (1995), in his introduction to a short study of the work of the tenth century Islamic theologian Al-Baqillani (d. 1013), identifies three developmental stages in the early centuries of relations between Christianity and Islam. Early attempts at relations soon proved futile as there was found to be no common ground: the Muslim believed the Christian scripture to be corrupted, the Christian believed the Muslim scripture was not divine revelation. A second stage involved the two parties starting to know the texts of one another, but failing to understand them as they were seen from within their own tradition, rather than from within the broader theological framework of the other religion. This equally failed to progress matters. The third stage which, in the opinion of Haddad, saw the move away from basic polemic, was the 830 establishment of the institute of philosophy known as the Dar al-Hikma (House of Wisdom) in Baghdad, which specialised in the translation of scientific and cultural works into Arabic (Sirry, 2005: 366). However, as Haddad makes clear, this work was rejected by many Muslim theologians as alien to the Qur'an, and polemic was still a significant dimension of encounter. Theologians such as Al-Baqillani made use of the new forms of rational philosophy to bolster their polemical refutations of Christianity. Nevertheless, a less polemical approach to dialogue was becoming a feature of the way in which Christians and Muslims encountered one another.

In this brief overview of some features of the early period of contact between Muslims and Christians we can see the development of theological responses to the 'other', the potential for shared academic pursuit and the development of political solutions to the existence of religious minorities. Although dialogue may have occurred between individuals, the recorded mode of communication is more orientated towards polemic or discourse rather than dialogue.

Political issues have throughout history defined to varying extents the form of relationship between Muslims and Christians. Despite, for example, the constructive relationship between Christians and Muslims in al-Andalus from the eighth to the eleventh century, the 'Reconquista' (Goddard, 2000a: 198), beginning in 1062, and the crusades beginning in 1095, used religious images such as depictions of Islam as a Satanic religion, to provide an ideology for war. As Waardenburg argues (2003: 1),



throughout history religion has been used as the tool of political necessity, providing a name for an otherwise diffuse and ill-defined enemy, as well as a name for an equally diffuse and ill-defined response. Invariably, therefore, it was the areas of difference and disagreement which were highlighted rather than areas of shared beliefs (Daniel, 1960: 194). Up to the seventeenth century Europeans considered themselves under threat from 'Islam', which in fact meant countries with Muslim populations, and therefore used 'Christianity' as the banner for response, for example in the Crusades. Equally, Europe or 'Christianity' became the threat during the eighteenth century and the colonised people equally made recourse to their religion, 'Islam', in defending themselves. This history of conflict is balanced against less recorded patterns of peaceful coexistence.

In a study of Muslim-Frankish Christian relations in the Sham region (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine) in the twelfth century, Dajani-Shakeel makes the interesting observation that even when the two powers were at war, peaceful coexistence was maintained between the Christian and Muslim populations in trade and travel: 'Coexistence and moderation thus triumphed. While the armies clashed in battle, the civilians lived on in peace' (1995: 197). In later periods also, it is possible to see examples of peaceful coexistence. In fifteenth century Jerusalem under the Mamluks the Muslim bureaucracy gave the Christian community, both residents and visiting pilgrims, power to conduct their own affairs: 'as long as they acted in accordance with law and custom so that religious, social and political equilibrium could be maintained in the city' (Little, 1995: 218). In this case, however, there appears to have been very little inter-faith dialogue or even contact between Muslims and Christians. The communities lived very separately, but demonstrated a degree of political and social expediency in the way communities regulated themselves.

Moving into more recent history, the role of western colonialism of countries with largely Muslim populations has significantly affected relationships between Muslims and Christians. Arguably, colonialism began with the discovery of new trade routes in the fifteenth century (Watt, 1991: 91). The increase in trade and economic activity led to increasing political involvement until by the eighteenth century European control extended across much of the globe. The end of the Second World War saw the beginning of the process whereby colonies began gaining political independence, although this was not necessarily accompanied by an end to economic or cultural

colonialism, which arguably continues to this day with the growth of global capitalism and the 'McWorld' phenomenon (Barber, 1992).

Colonialism is inextricably linked to two further elements which have significantly affected relations between Christians and Muslims: Christian mission and Orientalism. Mission was seen by some, but not all, representatives of the colonialist powers, as a significant aspect of the colonialist enterprise (Goddard, 2000a: 200), and continues to have a significant impact on Muslim responses to Christians (Rudolph, 1999: 298; Siddiqui, 1997: 195; Zebiri, 1997: 32). The colonialist drive to understand the Muslim peoples, in order to better control them, and for the missionaries to convert them, was related to the development of the 'Orientalist' scholar, famously critiqued by Edward Said (1978).<sup>34</sup> Said recognised the way in which the Orientalist academic enterprise developed an image of 'the East', and therefore the Muslim, as lesser and unequal to those of the west. A popular perception developed which did not see the Muslim community as capable of representing or developing itself, and therefore as being an unworthy partner in dialogue. Although Said's characterisation of Orientalism is not without its critics (e.g. McLoughlin, 2007; Mellor, 2004a; Watt, 1991: 109), the essentialist image of the Orient, and particularly Islam, that was developed and disseminated by these scholars can be seen to continue into the contemporary era.

Historically, inter-faith dialogue has been concerned with power, either explicitly through the relationship with missionary activity, or implicitly through the importation of western categories of religion. Inter-faith dialogue has been a text-based activity and was therefore the preserve of scholars of religion. Political issues and situations provided an impetus for different forms of dialogue with, and study of, the other faith. Efforts were made at various times to use dialogue as a route to dealing with some of the issues facing communities. However, history only tells us about the dominant discourse. Where there is evidence, it is possible to see that ordinary Muslims and Christians have often managed to find ways of continuing their lives together, and deepening their understanding of one another, despite political conflicts. That these efforts at living and practical dialogue are not recorded is indicative of where power lies between the dominant and demotic discourses of community and religion, and is

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<sup>34</sup> The emergence and critique of phenomenology of religion and the development of the study of religions, as explored in chapter one, is also related to the growth, and then critique, of Orientalism.



illustrative of who writes history, and how the category of religion is reified within the dominant discourse of dialogue.

### *2.3. Contemporary Factors Influencing Muslim-Christian Encounter*

Particularly since the mid-twentieth century, new forces have begun to have a significant impact on Muslim-Christian encounter and dialogue, particularly in increasing the extent to which encounter and dialogue, both formal and informal, occurs within and between communities. Changes in society, developments in communications technologies and international population movements have had practical and significant effects on the ways in which Muslims and Christians relate to one another.<sup>35</sup> There are few countries where both faiths do not have a presence, and many countries such as the UK where the two faiths are the principal religious expressions of the population.

In the UK, as elsewhere, the influence of secularity on Christians and Muslims has been significant. Section 3.4 below explores the nature of secularisation and its influence on Christian and Muslim communities in the UK. However, it is necessary here to briefly address how secularism influences how Christians and Muslims relate to one another. Within both Muslim and Christian communities there is a tension between those who attempt to engage with the secular world, and the more traditional, preservationist, forces who seek to prevent secularism influencing the 'true' faith. Muslim movements such as Jamaat-i Islami, Deobandi and the Barelvis have significant followings in the UK and are primarily founded on resistance to western modernity and secularity (Geaves, 1996; Lewis, 2002; F. Robinson, 1988). For some Muslims: 'the dialogue discourse is a part of the modern Western Christian discourse' (Siddiqui, 1997: 198) which is considered corrupted by the influence of secularity and is therefore highly contentious. This fear that dialogue is part of a secularist agenda poses a barrier to Muslim involvement in formal dialogue, and may influence the extent to which Muslims take part in informal dialogue. Equally, among some Christians there is also a fear that dialogue is part of a secularising agenda (Newbigin, Sanneh, & Taylor, 1998). For some more evangelical churches dialogue may be seen as only a forerunner of overt mission, if it is accepted at all.<sup>36</sup> For others however, the desire for dialogue is a positive

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<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the rise of the television and the internet can be seen to be giving voice to the demotic in the public square. Despite powerful influences in the world of new media, there is more often a focus on the popular and practical, on ordinary life and demotic discourse.

<sup>36</sup> This of course compounds Muslim fears that dialogue is part of a missionary enterprise.

response to an increasingly secular world, a desire to assert the importance of religious identity in the public square.

Within the secular, modern, context in the UK there is fluidity in articulations of personal and communal religious identity which challenge a simplistic understanding of Muslim-Christian encounter and dialogue. Enumerating the various ways in which it is possible to 'be' Christian, or 'be' Muslim is clearly beyond the scope of this study, yet it is possible to briefly indicate here some of the factors which complicate understandings of religious identity. Research findings in chapter six will provide evidence and examples of some ways in which articulations of identity relate to involvement in dialogue.

A significant proportion of the Islamophobia report of the Runnymede Trust (1997) looked at the realities of being a Muslim in Britain.<sup>37</sup> The report finds that there is no single identity that Muslims share. Muslims, like all people, are also members of ethnically defined groups such as Pakistani or Bangladeshi, and also draw a sense of identity from their work, home town, or political allegiance. However, it is the fact of being Muslim that is pivotal for many individuals in how they articulate their personal identity. The report refers to findings of researchers at the Policy Studies Institute in the mid 1990s who studied the importance of religion in the lives of a wide range of British people:

Seventy-four per cent of the Muslim respondents said that religion was 'very important'. This compared with around 45 per cent for Hindus and Sikhs, and only 11% for white people who described themselves as being members of the Church of England (Runnymede Trust, 1997: 15).

Factors such as international affairs and the growing sense of community strength from campaigns such as the Rushdie affair in the 1980s are identified as significant in this strong sense of Muslim identity. Conversely, for those who identify themselves as Christian, there is much less emphasis on religion as a marker of identity, with 89% of those who consider themselves members of the Church of England considering religion

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<sup>37</sup> The Islamophobia report of the Runnymede Trust's Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (1997) is an example of an institutional response to the growing recognition of anti-Muslim prejudice. The use of the term 'Islamophobia' is itself particularly significant as it represents an acceptance of a specific form of prejudice. Although primarily concerned with institutional discrimination and prejudice, and therefore not exclusively concerned with relations between Christians and Muslims, the report gives an important insight into the relationship between the Muslim population and the wider community in the UK at the time it was written.



as unimportant. The implication of this for Muslim-Christian dialogue, especially of an informal nature, is clear. Whereas in a formal dialogue setting participants may be able to fairly quickly establish what one another mean when describing themselves as Christian or Muslim, in an informal setting it may be much harder for individuals to understand the nature of one another's religious identity. As discussed above in chapter one, the category of religion as a western normative construct becomes problematic when applied to traditions other than Christianity. In the research findings for this study this is exemplified when both Christians and Muslims found themselves frustrated by the confusion between 'nominal' and 'practising' members of religions.

Waardenburg (2003) raises the issue of identity specifically in relation to inter-faith dialogue. For Waardenburg, the focus on: 'relations between "Islam" and "Christianity" as two more or less fixed religious systems to which one adheres or social blocs to which one belongs' is problematic and should be abandoned (2003: 32). His argument is that although this presentation may be useful for scholarly activity, and indeed his own follows this presentation, it is a distinction that does not do justice to the variety of religious experience and community, nor to the variety of ways in which religions relate to one another. Obviously, for those involved in dialogue there are many contextual factors which influence how religious identity is expressed and understood. To ignore these is to do a disservice to the potential variety possible in inter-faith dialogue and relations. Equally, at an individual level, Waardenburg argues that identity changes over an individual's lifetime; what the individual means when describing themselves as a Muslim or Christian is therefore a recurring issue in any dialogue. It is possible to argue, based on these issues around identity, that practical and living dialogue becomes even more important as a possible route to more fruitful relations and dialogue. In practical and living dialogue the variety and complexity of identity can be observed, rather than explained, providing a basis of shared experience and awareness prior to theological reflection.

Waardenburg's critique concerning how communal identity is understood in dialogue relates to the possibility of any one person 'representing' a religion:

As I see it, at least in the West, people from the two sides have to meet primarily as persons, rather than as representatives of their religion or community (2003: 481).

As well as within the field of dialogue, representation can be significant in negotiating religion in the public square, where public bodies may seek to consult or communicate with a religious leader or representative (Gilliat-Ray, 2004: 469-470; Knott et al., 2003: 31), or may demand that religions have representative structures with which the state can interact (Ferrari, 2005). Within the Christian community in the UK this is relatively straightforward with clear representative and leadership structures such as the parish and diocese, and people such as Bishops and Vicars, who have community as well as devotional roles within their community and their locality. Within the Muslim community there is much less clarity, with Imams often not being expected to have a role beyond their devotional and educational duties in the Mosque, and committee members taking a much greater role as community representatives (McLoughlin, 2005b: 1048). In both communities there is concern about how these leaders relate to the entire community, for example how women are represented by a largely male representative elite (Ali, 1992; Burlet & Reid, 1998), or how having a single representative continues the 'fiction of unity' in ethnic minority communities (Werbner, 1991b). There is also often a lack of awareness about the leadership structures within the other faith, or of the different branches of the Muslim and Christian community. This makes inviting participants to formal dialogue difficult, and has implications for how information is disseminated from dialogue to a community. Ramadan identifies the disconnection between 'specialists' in dialogue and those at the grass-roots of communities:

Many 'specialists' in interreligious dialogue, who go from conference to conference, are totally disconnected from their religious community as well as from grass-roots realities (2006: 96).<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, the nature of representation has important implications for the way in which theology is transmitted to communities, how the dominant and the demotic discourses of dialogue relate to one another, and how Muslims and Christians relate to one another in dialogical encounters.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A more extreme critique is offered by Calid Duran, who argues that 'Interest groups of experts in matters such as 'integration', 'racial equality', 'Christian-Muslim understanding' etc. tend to devote more energies to self-promotion and the ostracisation of rivals than to the noble cause they purport to advocate' (1986: 26- 27). Dissatisfaction with powerful elites provokes strong reactions.

<sup>39</sup> In chapter six the issue of how representation relates to identity will be discussed, and representation is also a key issue in chapter seven, with reference to the nature of community, and in chapter eight with reference to the policy environment.



Alongside nationally specific issues of secularism, identity and representation; relations between Muslims and Christians in the UK are also affected by global political situations where Christianity is equated with the countries of 'the West', and countries with Muslim populations are equated with 'Islam'. The controversy over cartoons of the Prophet which appeared in a Danish newspaper in 2006 became an international issue within days, with large scale demonstrations in many parts of the world. Although the Clash of Civilisations hypothesis (Huntington, 2002) may have been overstated, there is nevertheless a global climate of mutual suspicion between 'Islam' and 'the West' which is translated into tension between Muslims and Christians. This broad international political relationship between Islam and Christianity is influenced by the particularity of the local situation.<sup>40</sup> Muslim-Christian dialogue in the UK is affected by historical factors such as mission, but there are further specific issues related to the historical experience of the UK in relation to Islam. A more detailed overview of the national and local context will be provided below in chapters three and four. However, in order to illustrate the salience of local specificity to Muslim-Christian dialogue it is pertinent here to identify two features of the UK situation.

Firstly, before the colonial period Britain had not been directly affected by contact and conflict between Muslim and Christian Empires (Matar, 1998). Conflict with Islamic empires had not occurred on British soil. The principal contacts British people had with Muslim rule were the military campaigns of the Crusades, and established and developing trade links. Whereas local examples of peaceful coexistence can be found in other parts of Europe such as Spain, in the UK there simply was not a Muslim community of sufficient size for Christians to relate to. Awareness of Islam was therefore distant and easily distorted. In the colonial period, the contact with Islam continued to be limited, and images of Islam based on Imperialism, and 'Romantic exoticism' (Rodinson, 1998: 52) or Orientalism started to enter the popular imagination. Contemporary dialogue efforts in the UK are therefore set within a context in which historically Islam has been essentialised as exotic, political and war-orientated.

The second aspect of local specificity in the UK is the recent impact of international population movements. As discussed below in chapter three, the UK Muslim population

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<sup>40</sup> The interplay between the local and the global, and the individual's ability to bridge between the two, has led to the development of theory and discussion around the term 'glocalization', particularly in the realm of business studies. This refers to the simultaneous expansion of global awareness alongside the ability to make sense of this within the local situation.

has grown relatively quickly in the last fifty years. In the early days of this major wave of Muslim settlement Christian congregations, motivated by a desire to offer hospitality to the stranger, provided practical assistance to recent immigrants with everything from basic needs such as housing to the provision of facilities for Friday prayers (Siddiqui, 1996: 14).<sup>41</sup> Continuing dialogue motivated by a desire to secure: 'good community relations and interreligious understanding' (Siddiqui, 1996: 15), was initiated by local churches in areas with a large Muslim population. In the early 1970s the British Council of Churches established an advisory group on the presence of Islam in Britain that published guidelines for relations with Muslim neighbours. Other developments included The Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, and by the mid 1980s there was a profusion of inter-faith organisations in the UK. The Inter Faith Network for the UK was formed in 1987 as a means to link organisations and foster initiatives around the country. For Siddiqui at least this whole movement towards Muslim-Christian dialogue is related to the first large scale settlement of Muslim communities in the UK. As the Rushdie affair, the controversy over the Danish cartoons and the response to the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated, Muslims in the UK are particularly linked into global events. As will be discussed in chapter six, the 'glocal' experience of British Muslims living in diaspora, who respond to global issues in local situations, influences how they relate to Christians.

These two, related, features of the UK experience, a distorted historical image of Islam and a recent growth in a Muslim community which is influenced locally by global events, are a significant element in Muslim-Christian dialogue. As well as the constant process of learning about the 'other' community, which is one of the main activities of local inter-faith initiatives, there is also a need for continual renegotiation of the relationship between the two religions. Although awareness of global trends and issues is important for Muslim-Christian dialogue, and provides the main focus for many formal dialogue meetings, it is the specificity of the local context which is of most importance in informal dialogue and guides the work of local practical dialogue. However, it is possible to observe cross-cultural and international dimensions which many studies of inter-faith dialogue have in common. For instance, a study of late twentieth century religious coexistence in Kerala (Miller, 1995) identifies the need for: 'mutual respect, founded on objective knowledge, fed by motivational inspiration, and

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<sup>41</sup> The motives for such assistance were not always acceptable. Siddiqui (1996: 15) notes that some evangelical churches saw this work as an opportunity for evangelization.



released in co-operative social action' (1995: 279) in positive relations between religions. The previously quoted words of Kenny in relation to Nigeria are a further example of a contextual study which, although far removed from the context of this study, nevertheless echoes many of the findings. Oddbjorn Leirvik (2004), in a brief overview of the Norwegian situation regarding inter-faith relations also raises issues such as leadership, representation and the divorce between the dominant and demotic discourse of religious community and inter-faith dialogue. These international perspectives on inter-faith dialogue indicate the possibility that some of the issues identified as important in this study, such as the importance of the practical over the theoretical, and the distance between the dominant and the demotic, are as likely to be related to inter-faith dialogue as an activity in and of itself as to the national situation in which the dialogue is situated.

#### *2.4. Contemporary Theories of Muslim-Christian Dialogue*

Following this overview of historical and social factors affecting Muslim-Christian dialogue it is important to summarise and problematise some of the main theoretical and organisational responses to dialogue and religious diversity. This overview of contemporary theories of Muslim-Christian dialogue will demonstrate some of the diversity of approaches taken to dialogue, as well as the many points around which there is some convergence. Of particular interest is the way in which dialogue as a theological enterprise is seen to be related, or not, to dialogue as practice, as lived reality in the informal dialogue of living and practical dialogue. The focus here is on the *attitude towards* dialogue rather than the *content of* dialogue. There is a wealth of literature on the various areas of theological dialogue such as prophecy (Ipgrave, 2005), prophethood (Kerr, 1995), freedom (Burrell, 2004), mission (Scantlebury, 1996) and scripture (Ipgrave, 2004). However, these matters are tangential to the present study, and represent far too great a body of history and literature to do justice to here.

Christian responses to religious diversity are, unsurprisingly, varied. Maurice Wiles, in his short book *Christian Theology and Inter-religious Dialogue*, presents a radical approach to dialogue. Having admitted that he has had limited academic contact with religious traditions other than Christianity, and no experience of dialogue himself, he nevertheless develops a theology for dialogue.<sup>42</sup> Via a critical engagement with the

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<sup>42</sup> That is, a theology which provides a preparation for dialogue rather than makes sense of the engagement.



Christology of Christian theologian Karl Rahner, Wiles challenges understandings of incarnation and argues that it is necessary to lose the 'claim to be necessarily final and exclusive of any possibility of other incarnations' (1992: 72). Even more radically he argues that all inter-faith dialogue requires a 'revisionary approach to one's own religious faith and practice' (1992: 80). This approach to dialogue Wiles recognises as deeply difficult within some religions, identifying Islam in particular. This pluralist theology of religion draws on the work of John Hick (1973) and is an example of one of the key Christian responses to religious diversity: the development of theological positions intended to guide how the Christian responds to the challenge of other religions.

Keith Ward (2005) recognises that what he describes as the 'hard pluralism' of the Hickian school of pluralism, exemplified by Wiles, is unattractive to many Christians, partly because it can appear to tend towards a non-realist understanding of God. He advocates instead the 'soft pluralism' of liberal Christianity which accepts 'epistemic pluralism as a positive good' (2005: 201). This soft pluralism can be found in other writers who see dialogue in theological and often mystical terms, such as Kenneth Cragg (1986), and is also akin to what Martin Marty (2005) describes as 'radical pluralism' in his argument that 'belongers' should risk hospitality to 'strangers'. These varieties of delineation demonstrate the degree to which the division between exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist theologies is oversimplified. As Michael Barnes (2002: 8) points out, this three fold typology was mainly developed by Hick (1973), and later Alan Race (1983), who had themselves a pluralist agenda to promote.<sup>43</sup> Unavoidably, he argues, their characterisation of inclusivism and exclusivism serves the positive presentation of pluralism rather than doing justice to the complexity of Christian responses to religious diversity.

The body of Christian literature responding to religious diversity and other factors, such as secularism, provides the basis for understanding Christian institutional responses to Islam. In the UK the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches represent the majority of Christians. For both there have been significant statements and activity concerning Muslim-Christian dialogue in the past fifty years. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) proved a significant step for the Roman Catholic Church on dialogue, with

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<sup>43</sup> The debate over a pluralistic Christian theology is well documented. The two collections, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Hick & Knitter, 1988) and *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* (D'Costa, 1990) provide a range of responses on both sides of the debate.



statements specifically recognising Islam, highlighting what the two faiths have in common and opening up the possibility of collaboration on issues of social justice. These statements of intent were followed by the creation of a 'Vatican Secretariat for non-Christians' which became in 1989 the 'Pontifical Council for Dialogue between Religions'. The World Council of Churches (founded in 1948), the major international body representing Protestant churches, created a sub unit called 'Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies' in 1971 (renamed the Office on Inter-Religious Relations in 1991) and has also produced guidelines for dialogue with Muslims. However, as Bassett makes clear, this is not to say that there is a general consensus among the member churches of the WCC about the benefits of dialogue:

The so-called Evangelical groups and the fundamentalists are often resistant to this re-evaluation [of Muslims as neighbours] which they see as a surrender to worldly values and a betrayal of the Christian message (1998: 86).

There is therefore some tension in Christian responses to Islam. Although Muslims are invited to take part in dialogue, and there are positive moves towards improving relations,<sup>44</sup> there is also a desire among some in the church for a focus on evangelism, as was seen in the 1990s Decade of Evangelism which caused great concern to some Muslims (Raza, 1993: 97).<sup>45</sup> These church responses to inter-faith dialogue are based on a great diversity of Christian theological writing about dialogue and the place of other religions. Although adopting a broadly inclusivist position, both the Protestant and Roman Catholic Church have members who hold positions varying from the extremes of pluralism to the extremes of exclusivism.

There is a body of Christian literature concerning theological response to religious diversity which exists separately to literature specific to the Muslim-Christian relationship, and informs it. This is not apparently the case with Muslim literature in English. There are two possible reasons for this. The first is that, as the inter-faith endeavour is relatively new and possibly alien to Muslim theology there is not yet the need for a body of literature dealing with the fact of religious diversity other than that which expands on the existing Qur'anic injunctions. The second possibility is that the impression of the literature available is skewed by the limitation to literature in English,

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<sup>44</sup> For example, the 2002 Building Bridges Seminar held at Lambeth Palace (Ipgrave, 2002). The content of the dialogue, as with many formal dialogue meetings, was orientated towards historical and meta-discourses, with no reference to the 'lived reality' of religiously diverse neighbourhoods. This is partly explained by the range of participants who were principally religious and political leaders of international standing, the majority of whom were academics.

<sup>45</sup> Although Anglican led, the Decade of Evangelism was an ecumenical project.



which therefore tends to focus on Muslim responses to Christianity rather than wider religious diversity.<sup>46</sup> However, there is also a relative lack of Muslims writing on Muslim-Christian dialogue. The most obvious reason for this is that Islam offers a different form of challenge to Christianity than Christianity does to Islam. We have already seen how Muslims can draw on a series of Qur'anic teachings relevant to relationships between the two faiths. The traditional Muslim view is to 'include' in some sense Christianity, through the teachings regarding the People of the Book. However, there are some who distinguish the Qur'anic, or true Christianity from the western version of Christianity, which is considered flawed, and with which some Muslims have a deeply troubled relationship (Al-Attas, 1990: 114-115). Clearly, therefore, Islam's self-definition has developed in relationship to Christianity (Nasr, 1990; Rahman, 1990). This is, obviously, not the case for Christianity. The material which is available in English from Muslim authors relating to Christianity, though limited, provides a good insight into the main themes and responses which might be found in Muslim responses to other religions. As the literature on dialogue in general tends to be from a Christian perspective I shall devote relatively more space to Muslim responses to Christianity in order to provide some balance.

The extremes of rejection and fascination of the 'other' which can be found in Christian thought also exist in contemporary Muslim responses to Christianity. Unlike the mainstream Christian position, which may be easily mapped from the statements and actions of the principal church bodies; there is no easily identifiable Muslim position. Partly this is due to the lack of engagement with the field of dialogue among Muslim communities, but in the UK it is also linked to the lack of clear representative bodies for the Muslim community. Unlike the variety of Christian bodies promoting dialogue both nationally and globally, there are relatively few Muslim bodies promoting dialogue such as the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Economiques et Sociales in Tunis, and the Al al-Bait Foundation in Amman, and their influence on Muslim discourses about Christianity and dialogue is correspondingly weak. Drawing from a range of sources, many of which are popular rather than academic, Kate Zebiri finds that:

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<sup>46</sup> Waardenburg (1999) does contain some articles about Muslim relations with religions other than Christianity. A significant proportion of the literature available is published in volumes edited by western, and often Christian writers e.g. Cohn-Sherbok (1997), Griffiths (1990), Ridgeon (2001) and Waardenburg (1999), and is often (though not exclusively) researched by western, Christian academics rather than Muslims.



Perhaps the most striking element in this literature is that it continues to promulgate an East-West divide which is still often expressed in terms of a Muslim-Christian divide (2001: 198).

However, images of Christianity are very varied, and Zebiri finds that: 'the discourse is neither homogenous nor necessarily self-consistent' (2001: 199). In general she finds that the association of Christianity with the West results from the perceived close link between western imperialism and Protestant missions. Most importantly for the present discussion Zebiri concludes that responses to Christianity are consistently framed in political terms (2001: 200). Within the encounter between Muslims and Christians this type of literature may play an important role. This association of 'western' with 'Christian' may compound the problems already found in translating the different ways of understanding identity between the two communities.

Using as his source material Muslim periodicals in Arabic, Ekkehard Rudolph (1999) undertook a similar exercise to Zebiri in providing an overview of Muslim responses to Muslim-Christian dialogue. Like Zebiri he finds a substantial literature dealing with political issues. However, he also finds literature dealing with theological controversies concerning Christian dogmas and mission. He finds that: '[r]eflections on dialogue are rarely to be found' (1999: 298). Usefully, Rudolph characterises three approaches to dialogue in the articles surveyed.<sup>47</sup> Firstly, a Qur'anic approach which requires Christian acceptance of the Qur'an, secondly an ideological approach which sees dialogue as impossible or at most a competitive exercise about truth and falsehood. Lastly, Rudolph identifies an irenic strand which sees dialogue as both possible and necessary. He finds this to be 'the approach of an elite' (1999: 304) but considers it to be significant for discussion between Muslims.

In a study of depictions of Christianity in Islamic institutions in the UK,<sup>48</sup> Lewis identifies four broad responses (2001), which have similarities to those identified by Rudolph, but also significant differences. Firstly, in many Islamic seminaries

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<sup>47</sup> Rudolph's three strands of Muslim response to dialogue are akin to the three strands of Muslim thinking about Christianity in the modern world identified by Goddard (1996: 172) as polemical, irenic and intermediate.

<sup>48</sup> Again, there is an international dimension to this issue as there are often strong links between Islamic institutions in the UK and Muslims in South Asia, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Lewis finds that where personnel in UK institutions have origins or close ties to these countries: 'perceptions of Christianity owe as much, if not more, to their country of origin, than to the situation in Britain' (2001: 204).



Christianity is invisible or portrayed as 'irredeemably corrupt';<sup>49</sup> secondly there is an anti-Christian polemical tradition, often utilised by organisations involved in *da'wah*; thirdly there is a rejectionist stance taken by radical Muslim groups. The fourth response Lewis identifies is the most positive, and that is the move to pragmatic co-operation with Christians on 'a range of pressing social issues'. He finds that this fourth response: 'is beginning to generate a more informed and Islamically serious encounter with Christianity in its particularity and "otherness"' (2001: 205). This fourth strand is obviously akin to the irenic strand identified by Rudolph, but is different in being practically rather than philosophically orientated. This may be linked to the different experiences of a primarily South Asian Muslim community in a minority in the UK, as against an Arabic speaking community in countries with a Muslim majority. Whatever the reason for these differences, and they are too complex to analyse in this study, it is clear that a similar breadth of response to Christianity and the concept of dialogue can be found in a variety of literature surveys as well as Islamic institutions.

Mohamed Talbi offers a critique of the involvement of Muslims in Muslim-Christian dialogue and reflection. He identifies two principal reasons for the disparity in involvement between the two faiths. Firstly, he considers that few Muslims are equipped to take part, for reasons of language, education or opportunity. Secondly, he notes that the Christian involvement is more developed and theologically sophisticated, making the encounter easily unbalanced (1990: 85). He cannot identify one Muslim studying Christianity in the same way many Christians study Islam and he controversially states that, in the 'face of such unprecedented effort by the Church' Islam:

...offers us a theology whose evolution practically came to an end in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Muslim theology thus progressively lost contact with the world. For centuries, no new problems arose to challenge it and force it to investigate more closely the mystery of the world and of God (1990: 86).

Talbi argues for 'attentive openness towards our neighbour' (1990: 90) but is also concerned about those elements which must be avoided for fruitful dialogue. He

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<sup>49</sup> In his biography of Muhammad, Al-Isma'il provides a useful summary of the way Christianity is understood, at least in some quarters: 'After this already perverted version of the prophethood of 'Isa [Jesus] had been subjected to Greek philosophical principles and Roman pragmatism, both heavily tinged with outright paganism, and had then been further compromised by unscrupulous powerbrokers, it was far removed from its original purity' (1998: xiv).



specifies controversy, polemics and the desire to convert as well as, on the other side, complacency and compromise which could lead to syncretism and confusion.

For Tim Winter (2005), the Christian obsession with finding a theology to fit the experience of a diverse society is alien to the Muslim perspective. Referring to the significant differences in how Christian and Muslim scripture and tradition deal with the experience of other faiths, he demonstrates that Muslim scholars have: 'never needed to develop intricate theories of prevenient grace or post-mortem conversion' (2005: 211). This is a key issue in how Muslims, both theologians and grassroots community members, respond to Christians in dialogue. For the Muslim there is little need to enter into theological reflection about the position of the Christian. Rather, for many the choice is simply between accepting Christians as People of the Book, which provides a generally accepted inclusivist perspective, or rejecting Christians as following a distorted version of the original Christianity. Although there may be some variety in extremes with which these positions are taken, in general, the availability of a Qur'anic response to Christianity greatly reduces the theological engagement with concepts such as pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism as found in Christianity.

In both Christian and Muslim writing on dialogue it is possible to find those who, to varying degrees, reject dialogue completely. For some this is a straightforward rejection of the validity of the 'other' religion (e.g. Qutb, 1990). However, there are also more nuanced rejections of dialogue in totality or in part.<sup>50</sup> For example, Moltmann argues that dialogue is: 'not universally possible among all peoples and communities, and that there are hardly any universally applicable methods for furthering fruitful dialogue' (1990: 153). He also argues that dialogue is only useful in 'life threatening conflict' (1990: 154). There is plenty of evidence, and some will be provided by this study, that this is not the case in dialogue between religions, although Moltmann clearly found this to be true in Christian-Marxist dialogue. To some degree or other there must be some use found in inter-faith dialogue, or there would not be such a number and variety of

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<sup>50</sup> This is particularly the case within the Christian tradition where, as already highlighted, the scholarship on the distinct area of inter-faith dialogue is more developed. For example, Leroy Rouser critiques the asymmetry in relationships between Christianity and other faiths. He argues that Christians lead in the field of dialogue because of their felt need to repent of political, economic and theological sins of western colonialism. He considers the 'primary motivating purpose of dialogue is to salve the conscience of post-colonial Western Christians and solve the theological challenge of pluralism to the Western Christian understanding of God' (1986: 109).



bodies seeking to explore and promote dialogue, as surveyed for The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom (Crabtree, 2003).

Peter Riddell (2004) also, although not rejecting dialogue, criticizes the 'inclusivist train' in the churches for failing to see all aspects of the Biblical approach to other faiths. He particularly notes that the inclusivist position unfairly favours the concept of God's universal blessing whilst neglecting other Biblical themes such as the response to those who turn away, the centrality of faith, and the injunction to take the message out. Although not a complete rejection of dialogue, Riddell represents a less positive Christian response to dialogue. Milbank provides a more direct rejection of dialogue via his critique of pluralism. He argues for 'mutual suspicion' instead of dialogue, and does not: 'pretend that this proposal means anything more than continuing the work of conversion' (1990: 190). Most importantly for this study however, Milbank particularly criticizes common action in the socio-political sphere. His principal arguments are that this sort of work demonstrates the 'dominance of secular norms' (1990: 184) and that common action is in fact irrelevant to dialogue:

How can a consensus about social justice, which is relatively independent of religion, possibly help to mediate the differences between religions? The religions may agree upon common action, but this will neither help nor hinder a process of dialogue (1990: 182).<sup>51</sup>

Through my research findings I shall demonstrate that not only can common action be a way of asserting religious identity in the secular arena, but also that it can act as a seed bed for dialogue on theological matters.

A critique of practical dialogue provided by Jacques Lanfry (1985) argues that practical dialogue fails to address the desire of Christians to share religious experiences. This position, and that of Milbank quoted above, rests on a false dichotomy between practical and other forms of dialogue, and a false privileging of the dominant discourse. Not only does this position fail to recognise that theological reflection can be linked to, implicated in and drawn from practical dialogue and living dialogue, but it also assumes that the desire of all Christians is to share theological reflections rather than, for instance, focus on 'doing good works'. The privileging of religious experience and

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<sup>51</sup> What is common between Milbank and many other academics who write on the subject of dialogue is that they make very little reference to empirical studies which support their arguments. This study provides an example of the way in which theoretical issues can be better discussed with even a small amount of data to support an argument.



theological matters also assumes that all Christians are equally equipped to share religious experience on encounter with the religiously 'other'.<sup>52</sup>

It is my argument that historically, the emphasis of inter-faith dialogue has been on the dialogue of the theologian, and this form of dialogue continues to be dominant in understandings of what it means to be in dialogue with another faith. Texts charting the history of dialogue concentrate on the theologians and the theological issues discussed, or the political and diplomatic relationships between Christian and Muslim states (e.g. Siddiqui 1997; Goddard 1996). This theological dialogue becomes practical dialogue when it seeks to address specific issues such as the role of mission or *da'wah*, but remains the preserve of the theologian or historian and an exercise which is expected to filter down to communities and lay individuals rather than 'learn from below' through the experience of communities and individuals. To return to a distinction identified by Baumann (1996), and used throughout this chapter, inter-faith dialogue has historically been a dominant discourse of theology and religious leadership. It has been a reified activity that has had an important effect on the role of religion in the public square, because it occurs at a leadership level with which the state may seek to interact. This dominance can operate locally as well as nationally. Baumann found in Southall that an 'Interfaith community', involving Christians and minority traditions such as the Ba'hai, asserted a universalist theology which few local people could support. However, Baumann did find that this network provided the language for questioning the nature of religious community and the multicultural community (1996: 177).

The informal dialogue of living however is a demotic activity, in that it is shared by a significant proportion of the community. At this demotic level, as Baumann discovered in relation to culture, the concepts of religion, truth and religious identity are differently expressed and used. It is my contention that at the demotic level dialogue is closely linked to praxis, the day to day living of a religion. It more often relates to practical issues and concerns, and therefore may result from, feed into or lead to the practical dialogue which happens at a leadership level when action is required. However, the demotic dialogue is more often informal, pertaining to the negotiation of such practical

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<sup>52</sup> The distinction between 'action' and 'dialogue' is problematic at this point. John Cobb, for instance, although passionate about social action with other faiths, writes about this as distinct from taking part in dialogue with other faiths. He states that: 'For me, the primary purpose of dialogue for Christians is to learn from others in transforming ways' (2002: 180).

Unsurprisingly, he privileges theological dialogue rather than practical dialogue as the route for this learning.



matters as time off school and catering, or neighbourly conversation, and rarely engages the religious specialist or leader. It is not however, as my research findings will show, without religious content or significance. At this informal stage there is the potential for theory and praxis to meet one another, although there is little evidence that it does. The awareness at the demotic level of the dominant discourse of inter-faith dialogue is low. This is of significance both for theologians and leaders engaged in the dominant discourse, who might question the mechanisms, if they exist, for sharing their knowledge, but also has important implications for religion in the public square. The dominant discourse of community, and therefore Muslim-Christian dialogue, is the one most represented in the public square, and therefore most likely to influence government policy. Yet government policy seeks to address the needs of the whole community, a whole community which may experience the world differently to the form articulated by community leaders and theologians.

There is a relatively recent body of literature which recognises the problem of the distance between theory and the lived reality of inter-faith dialogue. Interestingly, however, few of the writers offer practical solutions to the problem. An exception is Margaret Shepherd and Jonathon Gorsky's (2006) overview of the contribution of Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford, to inter-faith relations. Shepherd and Gorsky identify four key themes: forgiveness, equal regard, hospitality and mutual enrichment. Although Harries' principal area of expertise is in the field of Jewish-Christian relations, the authors clearly perceive an overlap with issues concerning dialogue between all three Abrahamic faiths. Importantly for the present discussion the authors do link inter-faith theology to the lived realities of religiously diverse communities. For instance, they note that the issue of equal regard is 'problematic for all the major faiths, but it is difficult to see how community relations can develop if it is absent' (2006: 86). They also emphasise the importance of recognising diversity within religious traditions, and the impact of socio-economic factors, in order to understand the reality of religious expression that may be found in communities (2006: 88). However, most significantly the authors comment on the role of Harries' in bringing the Council of Christians and Jews to the grassroots and local groups: 'Previously, interfaith relations had been the province of scholars and the 'higher' clergy, whose work was important but did not emphasise or show great interest in the laity' (2006: 90).



This perspective on the field of inter-faith dialogue is useful in that it demonstrates that certain individuals, such as Harries, seek through their work to bridge the gap between the dominant theological discourse of inter-faith and the demotic lived reality of dialogue in local communities. However, it is still pertinent to question to what extent membership of local branches of the Council of Christians and Jews represents a truly grassroots membership. Even at the local level there are levels of dominance in discourses around matters of religion. Those involved in inter-faith groups and other explicitly theological enterprises do not necessarily represent a grassroots, or demotic level of discourse.

Catherine Cornille constructs a stronger, although not wholly positive, relationship between inter-faith dialogue and practical co-operation (2006).<sup>53</sup> Having identified a variety of necessary conditions for dialogue,<sup>54</sup> she asserts at the end of her article that: 'interreligious dialogue remains a matter of social and economic co-operation, or of discussions on concrete ethical issues' (2006: 41- 42). Whereas Cornille sees this form of dialogue as less than religiously satisfactory, my argument is that this type of dialogue is an important practical way forward for those who inhabit the lived realities of local communities as opposed to the reified dialogue of theologians and religious leaders. For example, the conditions for dialogue which Cornille suggests, in their nuanced and developed form, necessitate a familiarity with one's own religious tradition which is unlikely to be achieved by the average person in the church or mosque unless they seek out this specialist knowledge. Cornille herself recognises this:

Interreligious dialogue on God which aims at mutual enrichment and growth presumes a number of epistemological, psychological and theological conditions which together invoke rather high, possibly excessively high, expectations from religions (2006: 40).

However, this appears to disregard the benefits of living dialogue, and effectively ignores the demotic experience of dialogue. The value of the practical and lived dialogue, and the demotic discourse of which it is a part, provides the central theme for my research findings.

Jacques Waardenburg (2003), with over fifty years' experience of surveying the relationship between Muslim and Christian communities, argues forcefully that the

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<sup>53</sup> This is, however, incidental to the general thrust and import of her article.

<sup>54</sup> The conditions Cornille identifies include understanding and empathy, openness and commitment, humility, conviction, interconnection and generosity.



most productive way forward for dialogue is an orientation towards practical co-operation. Importantly, his argument is that by co-operating on 'common human and social causes' inter-faith dialogue will be better served than by: 'putting too much stress on the religions that are unavoidably different and that consequently separate people' (2003: 32). I would argue that this approach includes more members of any community than a narrowly theological dialogue which many will have religious reasons for not wishing to join. This is not to preclude the possibility that the contact between people will lead to theological reflection, indeed much of the evidence from my research findings is that this is precisely what does occur.

Through his reflection on *Nostrea Aetate*<sup>55</sup> and relationship between Christians and Jews, and informed by his own practical experience of working in multi-faith settings, Barnes draws out one particularly useful conclusion that: 'dialogue is less about debating truth claims than about creating the conditions within which the questions themselves can be heard and understood' (2006: 61). Barnes almost incidentally identifies that theology needs a role in the demotic theological discourse. He suggests that:

Perhaps that is what theology is for in this area – to introduce people to other traditions of faith, to get them to listen, to understand the different 'voices' which speak in our pluralist world, and then to learn how to respond appropriately (2006: 51).

Although this position is possibly justifiable in a monocultural community, I would argue instead that the lived reality of diverse communities gives people the introduction to other faiths, causes them to listen and challenges them to respond. It may be more productive if the role of theology was to make sense of, and respond to this reality rather than seek to provide a basis for it.<sup>56</sup> In an earlier book (2002), Barnes does draw a stronger connection between the 'lived reality' and the 'theological discourse'.<sup>57</sup> Here,

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<sup>55</sup> The 1965 Roman Catholic Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Relations: this was initially formed as a response to the Catholic experience of a fractured relationship with Judaism after the Shoah. The document provides a basis for the way in which the Roman Catholic Church responds to plurality.

<sup>56</sup> The primacy of the text in Islam and Christianity is a theological as well as historical or cultural statement; both religions being completely involved in sacred scriptures. This 'logocentric' position cannot be written out of the religions, but must be recognised as distanced from most Muslims and Christians.

<sup>57</sup> He argues: 'People of faith begin by living alongside one another, learning to accept each other as neighbours, sharing the same streets and schools and shops. They start engaging with each other in shared projects that express their common concerns ... They become interested in each other's religious texts and traditions; the familiarity of places of worship generates a



Barnes is concerned to develop a theology based on welcome and hospitality, which fully accounts for difference and local context and which is relevant in all contexts, not solely that of inter-faith dialogue. In his 1989 study *Religions in Conversation* Barnes draws out the significance of the practical in relation to the theoretical, noting in particular that: 'people do not meet in order to talk; they talk in order to meet' (1989: 112). He notes that the 'conference' model of dialogue is both formal and at a distance from the 'conversation model in which strangers become friends'. However, Barnes is clear that there needs to be something more to dialogue than this 'conversation', and it is here that dialogue as a theological activity, which addresses the deep and significant questions of truth must become part of the encounter (1989: 113-114). My research findings provide evidence of the potential for this to happen, but it also indicates that this theological enquiry, study and explanation of inter-faith dialogue is not part of the repertoire which those in communities generally bring to their relations with people of other faiths. Although an attractive, well argued and coherent theology, it is unclear how Barnes' ideas would relate to, or be disseminated among 'ordinary' Christians. In this sense these three books by Barnes not only deal with the issue of the relationship between the lived reality and theological discourse, but are in themselves an example of the problem: they do not show *how* to relate theory to praxis.

Hugh Goddard (2000a) also comments on the issue of the relationship between theory and praxis, although he characterizes this as a relationship between texts and communities, and focuses on the study of texts and communities rather than how they relate to one another. He argues that:

The aspiration for the future is not, therefore a case of texts *or* communities, but rather texts *and* communities as the way forward in the study of Christian-Muslim relations (2000a: 209).

Clearly there is a great deal to be learned about issues around conversion, for instance, from both texts on the subject and the lived reality of those who have converted. However, it is the interaction between text (theory) and community (lived reality) that is particularly significant for the future of Muslim-Christian dialogue. The dialogue between theory and praxis is vital to the dialogue between Muslim and Christian.

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willingness to listen in silence or even to experience for themselves something of the other's meditative practices... may eventually lead to conversation about the coherence of their images of ultimate truth and their hopes for the humanity they share' (2002: 243).

Although the Christian literature of inter-faith theology tends to lack reflection on practical applications, other areas of Christian theology such as liberation theology and contextual theology tend to focus on the lived realities of Christian communities, but rarely deal with matters of religious diversity. Two exceptions are Paul Knitter and Kenneth Leech. Knitter, writing within the Catholic tradition, argues: 'that Catholic theologians of religions adopt the methodology of liberation theology' (1986: 99). Knitter identifies the primacy of praxis in liberation theology, and argues for an orthopraxis of dialogue which prioritises right practice over right belief, which he describes as 'doing before knowing' (1985). Knitter prioritises the practice of traditional theological dialogue, taking a Hickian approach, although wishing to retain the centrality of Christ. He argues that: 'the question concerning Jesus' finality or normativity can remain an open question' (1985: 205). However, despite this prioritising of theological dialogue over practical or living dialogue, he recognises the significance of religions working together:

On the basis of this common praxis of political liberation and social transformation, the religions can continue to speak to each other, challenge and criticize each other, as to how their beliefs, their view of the world, of the ultimate and the self, can contribute to removing the evil wrought on human beings and on the earth (1985: 229).

Leech (2001) addresses inter-faith dialogue in his work of contextual theology reflecting on his experience of living and working in London.<sup>58</sup> Contextual theology is perhaps the form of Christian theology most amenable to the approach taken by this study: an approach which starts with the experience in the local community. However, as with liberation theology, there are no theologians taking seriously the challenge to traditional inter-faith theology which is offered by these newer models of theology. Leech argues that good theology must look 'at what is actually happening in communities' (2001: 153), and one of his principal reflections is that a: 'real and growing dialogue is more likely to grow from local co-operative action' because 'our experience is that co-operation and mutual learning often start with immensely practical issues, whereas 'inter-faith dialogue' which is not concretely based in local action tends to be a rather disconnected middle-class activity without roots in the communities'

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<sup>58</sup> Contextual theology is a form of Christian theology which focuses on the importance of the context which shapes theology. Leech produces a local theology which is sensitive to the importance of context in shaping theology. He therefore develops theological arguments based on experience as well as scholarship (Bergmann, 2003).



(2001: 152).<sup>59</sup> Although a very local summation of the situation, the variety of other texts that have been surveyed here indicate that Leech's conclusions can be considered to be universally as well as locally valid.

Many scholars have noted that Muslims and Christians tend to give different weight to theology and praxis in dialogue situations. Whereas Christians tend to focus on theology, Muslims tend to be more concerned with praxis than doctrine once the barriers to dialogue have been overcome (Siddiqui, 1997: 199; Zebiri, 1997: 9).<sup>60</sup> However, this appears to be justified only if looking at the dominant discourse of dialogue, rather than the demotic experience of dialogue. At the demotic level, both the Christian and Muslim focus tends to be on praxis, as this is the arena in which individuals can, and often must, engage with their neighbour even with very limited knowledge. Informally, Muslims and Christians in community build up a working knowledge of the other faith in order to take practical action for the benefit of both.

Ramadan (2006) provides an example of a Muslim scholar who takes an approach orientated towards praxis. He offers an overview of the Qur'anic texts which can be used as a motivation to dialogue,<sup>61</sup> as well as those which can be used to justify avoiding dialogue.<sup>62</sup> Having recognised that within any religious tradition there are different readings of textual sources,<sup>63</sup> he notes that in dialogue this diversity within a religious tradition can be hidden, and especially so within the Muslim community where intra-communal dialogue is 'virtually non-existent' (2006: 96). From a generally

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<sup>59</sup> Unlike Leech, I describe co-operative action and mutual learning as forms of dialogue: living dialogue and practical dialogue.

<sup>60</sup> The significance of theology as a barrier to dialogue for Muslims may be seen in polemical sermons in the Mosque and Madrasa (Lewis, 2001).

<sup>61</sup> E.g. Surahs 2: 88, 6: 35, 10: 99, 5: 48, 2: 256, 2: 251, 22: 40, 49: 13.

<sup>62</sup> E.g. Surahs 5: 17, 98: 1, 3: 19, 3: 85, 2: 120, 3: 28. Jane McAuliffe argues that the bulk of Qur'anic references to Christians are negative. However, she also argues that the Christians the Qur'an appears to commend are a 'conceptual idealization' rather than referring to a 'real' community (McAuliffe, 1991).

<sup>63</sup> Issa J. Boullata (1995) makes this point with reference to the Qur'anic injunction 'Vie, therefore, with one another in doing good works'; surah 5:48 and 2:148. Although most scholars interpret this as concerned with pluralism and a basis for inter-faith relations, Sayyid Qutb interpreted the injunction as applying only to Muslims. His view required that inter-faith relations are only possible if the supremacy of Islam is recognized. Variety in interpretation of texts is also an important feature of the Christian tradition. Antonie Wessels, having noted that there are texts which can be read as anti-dialogue (Acts 4: 12, John 14: 6) as well as those which can be read as pro-dialogue (Colossians 4: 5, 1 Thessalonians 4: 12, Malachi 1: 11, Acts 14: 16-17), recognises that the interpretations that are placed on the texts depends in large part on the degree of apprehension concerning syncretism (1995: 55).

negative impression of theological dialogue<sup>64</sup> Ramadan seeks to build a justification for inter-faith action (which I have described as ‘practical dialogue’) arguing that:

One of the best testimonies that a religious or spiritual tradition can give of itself is in acts of solidarity of its adherents with their neighbours, towards the other (2006: 99).

He notes a growth in dialogue initiatives at a local level but maintains that it is the people who are already open minded who become involved in such activities. The full range of denominations, tendencies or schools of thought within a religious tradition are not represented and, especially, those with closed opinions do not get involved.<sup>65</sup>

In his article Ramadan does not show how, if at all, it is possible to make the connection between theological dialogue and the lived reality of dialogue in religiously diverse neighbourhoods, but he makes a bold and important statement from within the Muslim tradition for the primacy of the dialogue of action over the dialogue of theology. It is this approach which I favour in my study, but it is the ways in which theology and action can relate to one another which I seek to develop further. The relationship between demotic and dominant discourses of Muslim-Christian dialogue, between the theory and praxis of Muslim-Christian encounter, and between the state and the reified concepts of religion and identity, are central to this study, and will be returned to continually throughout the analysis of the fieldwork. The following chapters, firstly on the national context of relations between religion and state and secondly on the local context for this study, will provide a practical focus for some of these theoretical concerns.

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<sup>64</sup> ‘In spite of thousands of dialogue circles and meetings, we still seem to know each other very little and to be very lacking in trust’ (Ramadan, 2006: 100).

<sup>65</sup> A point also noted by Moltmann when reflecting on his experience of Christian-Marxist dialogue: ‘the real problems did not arise between open-minded Christians and Marxists, but from Marxists and Christians who were *not* part of the dialogue’ (1990: 153).



### Chapter 3: The National Context: Religion in the Public Square

Projects like Faith Together in Leeds 11, the main source of data for this study, do not happen in a social, political or historical vacuum. As well as the local impetus for co-working in Beeston, discussed below in chapter four, there is also a national, historical and state framework which creates the structures within which co-working between Muslims, Christians and the state can occur.<sup>66</sup> Faith-based social action, lobbying, representation and faith-to-state communication develop on a local level partly in response to national needs and issues.<sup>67</sup> In order to situate my research within a national context, this section will provide an outline of the relationship between state and religion in England. This will begin with an overview of the history and nature of the established church in England, and then a more focused consideration of the recent history of religion in England, with particular reference to the growth of religious diversity and the nature of the secular. Some key points will then be used to exemplify various features of the contemporary relationship between religion and state. The argument throughout is that national issues impact on local relations and experiences to varying extents, but, as will be explored in chapter eight, it is not always clear how this agenda responds to and appropriately serves local needs.

#### *3.1. The Established Church of England*

The history of the relationship between religion and state in England has primarily been the history of a relationship between church and state. England is the main focus of this study, and has a specific character which is different to other parts of the UK. It is therefore appropriate to focus on the English experience in considering the relationship between religion and state.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the growth, since the Second World War, of other faith communities and those allying themselves to no faith, the principal faith in England, as in the rest of the UK, is Christianity. Numerically, historically, financially and politically the Christian churches

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<sup>66</sup> For the purposes of this overview 'the state' refers to local, regional and national governmental machinery.

<sup>67</sup> The contested use of the word 'faith' rather than 'religion' is discussed in chapter eight.

<sup>68</sup> The history of Christianity in Scotland is covered by many authors, including Gordon Donaldson (1990), and Callum Brown (1997). The history of Christianity in Wales is also covered by many authors, one example being Glanmor Williams (1991). The history of the church in Northern Ireland is the subject of a considerably larger body of literature, as a result of the political ramifications and issues. Examples of texts dealing with the history of the churches in Northern Ireland include Irvine (1991), Bowen (1995) and Harris (1993).

retain a degree of power both locally and nationally. The Christian tradition has always, to varying degrees, drawn a distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane', and as such there has rarely been a complete overlap of church and state. Indeed, Swidler (2002: 66-67) considers the separation of church and state to have been essential in the development of Western civilization. However, as Adrian Hastings argues (1991), the development of the modern nation state in England has been significantly affected by a dynamic relationship with the church.

The church in England has a history which exceeds that of the political state. As Hastings notes:

When England gained a unifying monarchy and became a single state in the ninth and tenth centuries, the archbishopric of Canterbury and the church had already been functioning as a unifying factor for two centuries (1991: 10).

The separation from Rome began in the reign of Henry VIII, with the Act of Supremacy passed in November 1534 marking the separation in law of the church in England from the church in Rome. After the brief reign of Edward VI in which this separation was consolidated, and then the equally brief reign of Mary where there was a reversion to Catholicism, the long and stable reign of Elizabeth I was the period in which the discrete Church of England was consolidated and took root in the popular consciousness (Rosman, 2003: 54). The Second Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity of 1559 were 'a delicate operation to balance a variety of forces ranging from the conservatives to the returned Protestant exiles' (Hylson-Smith, 1996: 31), and provided a legal framework for the Church of England.<sup>69</sup>

In order to consolidate the position of the Church of England, and to some extent defend the nation against the perceived political and religious threat of the growth of Nonconformity, the continuing presence of Roman Catholicism and the return of the previously expelled Jewish communities, legislation was passed to prevent those outside Anglicanism having political power in England.<sup>70</sup> Although the 1689 Toleration Act gave Nonconformists, but not Roman Catholics or those of other faiths, the right to freedom of worship, the 1661 Corporation Act and 1673 Test Act excluded from civil or military office all those not taking the sacrament according to Anglican rites. Until the

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<sup>69</sup> The established church in England, the Church of England, is the mother church of the worldwide Anglican communion.

<sup>70</sup> The Jews were expelled from England in 1290 under the reign of Edward I. They began to return during the mid seventeenth century.



1828 Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts Kenneth Hylson-Smith argues, 'membership of the established state church was a prerequisite for full citizenship under the British constitution' (1997: 255).<sup>71</sup> The nineteenth century erosion of the supremacy of the Church of England did not see it lose authority in all matters. The extent to which the Church of England retained its central place in the life of the nation can be seen in the vestigial public roles it retains today. In contemporary England the monarch is 'Protector of the Faith', Head of the Church of England, and therefore has to be an Anglican. The monarch is anointed in an Anglican ceremony. Anglican Bishops and the two Anglican Archbishops are the only religious representatives to have seats in the House of Lords.<sup>72</sup> Royal and civil events, such as Remembrance Day, are usually Anglican in character. The common law of blasphemous libel only applies to the teachings of Christianity as recognised by the Church of England.<sup>73</sup> A significant number of schools were originally Church of England schools, and as a result of the 1944 Education Act, many of them continue to be run, at least in part, by the Church of England (Hastings, 2001: 417). Even architecturally many cities, towns and villages have Anglican churches as their most significant landmarks. It is also the case that, despite the Enabling Act of 1919 which gave General Synod much wider powers to change liturgy and doctrine, the government has some power still remaining over the Church of England, involvement in the selection of bishops being perhaps the most obvious example (Bogdanor, 1997: 224).

Clearly, the Church of England is more than nominally a state church. Although '[f]ormal connections between Church and State guaranteed by the constitution remained curiously intact and visible – but hollowed out' (Taylor, 2002: 44), the complete separation of church and state which is apparent in France and the USA is alien to the English experience. Stephen Monsma and Christopher Soper define the situation as that of 'partial establishment', and argue that this model: 'sustains a cultural assumption that religion has a public function to perform and it is therefore appropriate for the state and church to cooperate in achieving common goals' (1997: 121). This assumption has led to the general acceptance of the involvement of faith communities in

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<sup>71</sup> The 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act opened the way for full Catholic involvement in the affairs of the country, as did the 1830 Jewish Emancipation Act for the Jewish community.

<sup>72</sup> There are Lords of other faiths and denominations, but their seats are not protected for members of their faith community

<sup>73</sup> As was highlighted in 1989/90 during the 'Satanic Verses' affair (Webster, 1990: 22).



lobbying and community liaison, as well as providing community and welfare services which might otherwise be provided by the welfare state.

The relationship between the state and the Church of England is dynamic, and there is evidence of a shift away from the Church of England as a necessary part of the state machinery.<sup>74</sup> Prince Charles in a 1994 television interview expressed a desire to be known as 'defender of faith', rather than 'defender of the faith' should he become King. Potential changes in the House of Lords may see the Bishops losing their seats. Increasingly, as Sophie Gilliat-Ray (2004) demonstrates in her study of the Faith Zone of the Millennium Dome, royal and civil events are expected to have a multi-faith element.<sup>75</sup> Related to this increased separation of the Church of England from the state are arguments in favour of its disestablishment.<sup>76</sup> Pressure for disestablishment has been a feature of the English political landscape since the latter part of the nineteenth century, when Irish disestablishment in 1869 and then Welsh disestablishment in 1914, gave the issue some importance. However, although pressure still exists it is reasonably restricted. The Christian think-tank Ekklesia (2007) argues in favour of disestablishment, as do bodies such as the Liberal Democrat party (2002), and the British Humanist Association (2002). Others argue for an evolved relationship, with political relationships between church and state removed but a role maintained for the Church of England as the national church (McLean & Linsley, 2004). Disestablishment is by no means universally popular among those outside the Church of England, and nor has it gained much popular support. Indeed, some outside the Church of England wish to see establishment continue because of the privilege over secularism that it is perceived to extend to all religions, while some within the Church of England support disestablishment (Modood, 1997: 13).<sup>77</sup>

The historical significance of an established church continues to influence the modern English experience of, and response to, religion. However, events during the twentieth

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<sup>74</sup> The impact of the growth of religious diversity, and the contested growth of secularism, is clear in all of these issues, and will be returned to below.

<sup>75</sup> However, Gilliat-Ray identifies the ways in which this inclusion was a subtle exercise in excluding 'a number of aspects of religious life and practice in Britain today' (2004: 474).

<sup>76</sup> Paul Weller provides a cogent argument from a Baptist viewpoint, and using organisational negotiation and change theory, for active decision making about establishment, arguing that: 'the perpetuation of establishment – whether through active or passive support – is something that is theologically and politically inadequate to the changed religious, social and political landscape of the twenty-first century' (2005: 3).

<sup>77</sup> The Anglican Church is also perceived as having a potentially significant role in acting as an intermediary between all religions and the state.



century, particularly after the Second World War, have had a significant impact on the role of religion in public life. In order to more fully understand the contemporary situation, it is necessary to trace some of the key issues during the twentieth century, notably the rise of religious diversity and the impact of secularity, before providing a more detailed account of the relationship between religion and state since the early 1990s.

### 3.2. *The English Churches and the State in the Twentieth Century*

For all churches, the rapid societal change of the twentieth century proved a major challenge to the traditional balance of power in the country:

The Christianity of the Edwardian age was a sitting duck simply waiting to fall victim to an amalgam of world wars, scientific self-confidence and the advance of a consumer society titillated by a new multiplicity of trivial pursuits (Hastings, 2001: xvi).

The impact of religious diversity and the growth of secularity were of great significance in the relationship between the churches and the state in twentieth century England. However, as Brown (2006) has identified, the impact of the First and Second World Wars, the economic depression of the 1930s, and the changing role of women in society also affected the influence of the churches and the relationship between church and state. The period after the Second World War was perhaps the most significant in terms of understanding the present relationship between the churches and the state.

The creation of the welfare state during the late 1940s was a goal which 'progressive Christians had had their eyes on for years' (Hastings, 2001: 422). The coming together of Keynesian doctrine in Labour Party policy and the experience of the Great Depression and the Second World War, created the ideal historical moment for this great social experiment (Clark, 1993: 2). However, responses to the social state were mixed, as Brown notes:

A brave new world of the social state seemed to beckon after war. For some this implied an end to traditional religion; for others it meant that the Kingdom of God was about to materialise (2006: 168).

The churches slipped into a period of 'ecclesiastical social conservatism' (Hastings, 2001: 423) in response to the achievement of the Welfare State,<sup>78</sup> but also in response to

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<sup>78</sup> There were nevertheless some concerns about the Welfare State particularly that it should not erode the scope for individual and church led action on social issues (Machin, 1998: 139). The



the threat of atheistic communism in the Soviet Union. There was a growth of moral conservatism during the 1950s, with a moral austerity visible in culture which 'seemed to belie the spread of plenty and innovative consumer goods' (Brown, 2006: 178). Unsurprisingly the 1950s have been described as a 'Conservative decade' (Hastings, 2001: 426), for the churches as well as the state.<sup>79</sup> The first televised, and therefore popularly witnessed, coronation in 1953 underlined the enduring role of the established church. Brown reviews local and national surveys of religious activity and finds that some indicators show a relatively low level of church attendance. However, he finds that underlying this is a situation where many people were occasional rather than weekly church attendees. He therefore argues that '[s]o many people claimed in 1950 to be churchgoers at some point in the year that what is revealed is a highly religious society underpinned by a widespread Christian culture' (2006: 185). The 1950s are a 'golden age' in the memory of the churches because of the perceived relevance and importance the churches had at the time. For much of the following decades the churches have been concerned with how to regain that perceived relevance.

The permissiveness of the 1960s proved a new challenge to churches, not only culturally, but also more concretely when it became clear there was a dramatic numerical decline in church attendance. It is claimed that between 1960 and 1985 the size of the Church of England was effectively halved (Hastings, 2001: 603). Decline was also experienced in the Nonconformist churches. The Methodist church had been experiencing decline since the 1930s, but this increased from 1960, with numbers falling from 728,589 in 1960 to 335,567 in 2000 (Brown, 2006: 25). Decline even began to occur in the Roman Catholic Church which had been experiencing steady growth for fifty years mainly because of Irish immigration. For all churches the factors involved in this decline are various, and it is important not to 'simplify the forces of change or the multiple ways in which they interacted' (Hastings, 2001: 581). However, the changing nature of modern society was as significant in their decline as the actions or inactions of the churches. The changing role of women in society, the growth of mass media, a decline in respect for authority and changing societal, but not religious,

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positions of the churches, and their members, have never been uniform on any social or political issue.

<sup>79</sup> Hastings also identifies (2001: 426) that this was the period in which Conservative politicians such as Macmillan, Butler and Hailsham were publicly recognised as Anglicans. The Labour party in the same period started to become increasingly secular, despite a history of relationship between the Labour party and Nonconformist churches (Monsma & Soper, 1997: 125), and the presence of a number of Nonconformist Members of Parliament (Benn, 2004).



attitudes to issues of sex and sexuality are among many issues which Brown (2006: 224-270) identifies as significant in the 'Sixties Revolution' and the churches' decline during the 1960s. That the churches were provoked to respond to the changing world is clear. The publication of John Robinson's *Honest to God* (1963) was a major theological moment when the new liberal theologies began to impact on public awareness. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1966) was a pivotal theological and social moment for the Roman Catholic Church, and led to significant changes in Roman Catholicism. However, theological and structural novelty was not sufficient to regain the relevance the churches were felt to have had in the 1950s.

In the 1970s and 1980s all churches in England were adjusting both to their changing numerical strength, and to a changing world. Economically, culturally, socially and politically, a new era was beginning, marked by the election in 1979 of Margaret Thatcher's New Right Conservative government (Clark, 1993: 6). The rise over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of social Christianity was now seriously challenged by a new political power which saw itself as fully in accord with Christian teaching. Indeed, Thatcher herself 'overtly based her politics on her religious upbringing' (Machin, 1998: 226). Conflict between the Thatcher government and the Church of England first became significant in 1982 when the church, in holding the memorial service for the Falklands war, refused to 'make the service a triumphant victory celebration' (Clark, 1993: 10). However, it was on social and economic grounds that all the churches most differed from the Thatcher government. The two roles of the church in the social sphere as 'prophetic' and 'pastoral' (Clark, 1993: 1) were both tested at this time. Pastorally, the growing numbers of people living in poverty were increasingly turning to the churches for assistance: 'That it left a great deal more for the churches and voluntary agencies to do neither surprised nor displeased her [Thatcher]' (Hastings, 2001: xxvi). In their prophetic role, church leaders were outspoken critics of the Conservative government, and the *Faith in the City* report (Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, 1985) demonstrates the scope of criticism of the new political situation in the country from within the established church.<sup>80</sup> Interestingly,

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<sup>80</sup> In 1983 the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, convened a commission which was to write the *Faith in the City* report. Prompted by the inner city riots of that year, and motivated by concerns about levels of poverty and deprivation in the inner city, the report was published in 1985. The commission was mainly lay, and mainly though not exclusively Anglican (Machin, 1998: 228). The Report was attacked by the Conservative government, although the bulk of the recommendations were aimed at the Church itself (Hastings, 2001: xxxvii). It covered issues including public spending on child benefit, aid for small firms and for



*Faith in the City* appears to be an early major document which consistently used the phrasing of 'faith communities' rather than 'religion' – and perhaps may be the point at which this terminology came into use.<sup>81</sup> *Faith in the City* focused on issues of economic marginalisation and deprivation which had been brought into sharp focus by the riots of 1981 and 1985. The recommendations to government covered areas as diverse as education, housing and social policy while the recommendations to the church covered areas around social engagement, clergy training and building use. Although mention was made of racism, the presence of other religions was not a major factor of the report, meriting a short section in a chapter 'Theological Priorities'. The tone is positive towards working with other faiths, but tends towards projecting a role for the Church of England as a conduit for other religions into the public sphere (1985: 61). The report was important not only because it pushed issues of economic deprivation up the political agenda, but also because it demonstrated that the Church of England continued to have a role in English society:

The government had chosen to pursue particular economic policies; the Church's personnel found itself experiencing the consequences of such policies firsthand in the communities in which they lived; and they – through the Commission – declared those consequences unacceptable. The fact that those most likely to suffer were not churchgoers was immaterial (Davie, 1994: 152-153).

After the efforts in the 1960s to respond to the growth of secular culture, and alongside this move in the 1970s and 1980s to establish social relevance, Grace Davie highlights how the churches in many ways become distrustful of the secular and: 'the pendulum began to swing once again towards a greater emphasis on the distinctiveness of the sacred' (1994: 36). The growth of new religious movements, Black-majority churches, house churches and the religions of the new South Asian communities began to have an impact on how religion was understood and experienced in English society.

In the second half of the twentieth century the relationship between religion and state was changing from that which existed at the beginning of the century. Increasingly, religion was no longer an accepted facet of national life, and certainly no longer assumed to be Anglican. However, religion was still heard and seen at pivotal moments.

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job creation, and public housing especially for the homeless. In 1995 it was judged (McCurry, 1995: 4) that of the 38 recommendations to the church, 15 had been carried out in full, 10 had been carried out in some places or in part, nine had not been carried out and four were unknowns. Of the 23 recommendations to the government and nation, one had been carried out. This provides some indication of the extent to which the report, and therefore the church which produced it, was at odds with the government of the time.

<sup>81</sup> I am indebted to the Revd. Guy Wilkinson for suggesting this.



The 1990s and the first years of the new millennium have demonstrated firstly how religion, especially through the growth of religious diversity, has continued to maintain its saliency to English culture and political life, and secondly how secularisation has proved to be a more complex pattern than was initially imagined. In the following sections the relevance of secularisation and religious diversity will be explored before some key moments in the period between 1990 and 2007 are identified and discussed as examples of key issues in the contemporary relationship between faith and state.

### 3.3. *The Growth of Religious Diversity*

The existence of seventeenth century legislation in regard to Nonconformists, Roman Catholics and Jews provides clear evidence that there has been diversity in the religious landscape of England for some time. Nonconformity grew in its organised forms during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, with the growth of Quakerism, Methodism, Presbyterianism, Congregationalism and Unitarianism among others. However, it was only in the nineteenth century, with the full emancipation of Roman Catholics and Nonconformists that those outside the Church of England began to have a significant voice in English society and in government.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, a considerable challenge to the traditional relationship between religion and state in England has been posed by the growth of religions other than Christianity, and the growth of the Black-majority Churches.<sup>82</sup> There has been an historical assumption that it is Christianity, through the Church of England, which is the religion with which the state must do business. However, with falling attendance in the mainstream churches the relatively small communities of other religions and of non-traditional Christian communities represent a relatively large worshipping community. Although other religions, not least indigenous 'Paganism', have been present in the British Isles for as long if not longer than Christianity, it is only in the modern era that there has been so much religious diversity. As a Muslim

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<sup>82</sup> Davie found in 1990, that membership of Afro-Caribbean congregations was almost 70,000 in 965 congregations 'which have in difficult circumstances become an important hub of effective community life' (1994: 63). Growing out of a negative experience of the existing churches, the Black-majority churches provide important community services, and create a sense of community, reversing the usual expectation of the traditional churches, which exist to provide services to already existing communities (1994: 111-112).



community is central to this study, a brief overview of the history of the Muslim presence in England is important to give context to the contemporary situation.<sup>83</sup>

Contact between British Christians and Muslims from around the world may go back as far as the seventh and eighth centuries (Hellyer, 2007: 226), and the relationship with Islam has been significant for the whole of Europe.<sup>84</sup> There have been Muslim converts of English extraction since the seventeenth century (Hellyer, 2007: 229), and converts were important in establishing early Muslim communities in the UK in the nineteenth century (Ansari, 2004: 82). However, the majority of the Muslim population in the UK has arrived as a result of migration. As well as the pre-modern migration of Arab traders and intellectuals, the British Empire was responsible for the growth of migration from British colonies, and with the demise of the Empire this movement of population continued under the Commonwealth. Early migrants were former sailors, so the main population centres were around ports such as Cardiff, Liverpool, Newcastle and London. The most significant growth in migration from countries with mainly Muslim populations occurred after the Second World War when there was a demand for industrial labour. Commonwealth citizens from rural areas of Pakistan and Bangladesh were recruited and settled around industrial cities, especially London, Birmingham, Manchester and Bradford. Examples of studies of these communities include Ballard (1994), Saifullah Khan (1977) and Werbner (1990). With tightening immigration legislation in the early 1960s the original community of transient workers were joined by their families.<sup>85</sup> Over the next twenty years they became established as institutionally complete communities, whether perceived as British Pakistanis, South Asians or British Muslims (Anwar, 1979; Werbner, 1991b: 131-132). Over recent years the ethnic

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<sup>83</sup> Many of the earlier studies of 'new' communities in England were anthropological and as such focus on the ethnic, specifically Pakistani, rather than religious, specifically Muslim, identity of immigrants to the UK. Some, although not all, anthropological studies make note of the varieties of ways in which identity is constructed, and the implications of this for studying a heterogeneous community (Werbner, 2002: 17). McLoughlin traces the pattern of writing specifically about Bradford and notes the variety of writing from anthropology to religious studies, via other forms such as fiction and travel writing, which give an account of the Pakistani Muslims of Bradford (McLoughlin, 2006). Although any equation of Pakistani with Muslim is clearly flawed, the emphasis in this study on a Muslim community that is primarily Pakistani justifies the use of material which is ethnically rather than religiously orientated.

<sup>84</sup> Matar (1998) argues that the formation of modern Europe was significantly affected by Islamic civilization.

<sup>85</sup> The Mangla Dam project, which displaced thousands in Mirpur area of Pakistan also acted as a push factor for migration in this period (Saifullah Khan, 1977: 66-68)



diversity of British Muslims has been increased by British converts,<sup>86</sup> and by Muslims from other countries settling in the UK for a variety of push-pull factors. According to the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey, 31% of Muslims identified their country of birth as 'UK and Ireland', while 43% identified their country of birth as 'Indian Subcontinent', and the remaining 26%, were made up of those whose countries of birth were identified as Europe, Middle East, Africa, Asia, and other (O'Beirne, 2004: 11). The census data for 2001 (National Statistics Online, 2003) shows that 2.7% of the UK population identify themselves as Muslim.<sup>87</sup> This large and diverse Muslim presence has had a significant effect on the evolving policy response to diversity, especially the critique and development of multiculturalism.

Responses to increasing cultural diversity in the UK were initially based on race and ethnicity rather than religion (Taylor, 2003). The reality of cultural plurality is sometimes referred to as multiculturalism. However, the term multiculturalism also refers to a range of local and national policy responses to cultural diversity, as well as the political theory which underpins these policies. The range of legislative responses in the UK, such as the 1965 Race Relations legislation, and local efforts to fund culturally specific services are evidence of a multiculturalist agenda. In the 1970s politicians such as Enoch Powell were entirely negative towards immigration, and the multicultural response, and saw race as the potential and actual cause of social disturbance. This was balanced by a more positive attitude to immigration, a more active anti-racist stance, and support for multiculturalism from within some parts of the Labour party, which had been responsible for the early race relations legislation and which has become the political party most supported by British Muslims.<sup>88</sup> Multiculturalism as a theory and a policy has been extensively critiqued, principally though not entirely in response to the failure of multicultural policy to address the needs of Muslims. Bhikhu Parekh, in his *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, also known as the 'Parekh Report' (2000), challenged the multicultural essentialising of cultures and communities, and argued for balancing the 'community of communities' model of multiculturalism with a

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<sup>86</sup> Although Nielsen (2004: 44) argues this is a very small group, estimating 10,000 as an upper limit.

<sup>87</sup> Other figures are: Hindu 1.0%, Sikh 0.6%, Jewish 0.5%, Buddhists and 'other religion' were both 0.3% of the population. 2001 was the first time a religious question was asked in the census, and its use provoked extensive debate (Aspinall, 2000).

<sup>88</sup> As Ansari notes 'Information on voting patterns from 1974 onwards reveals that the majority of British Muslims have supported the Labour Party, since they have perceived it to be more sympathetic to their concerns than the Conservatives' (2004: 240). It remains to be seen if attacks on Iraq and Afghanistan will have a lasting effect on British Muslims' voting patterns.



'community of citizens' model. However, there are less theoretical and more practical problems that are seen to be the result of multicultural policy, as Jocelyne Cesari summarises, 'Multicultural policy is seen as a contributing factor to economic marginality and to religious segregation, insofar as it reinforces the exceptionality of Muslim immigrants without providing them with a means for real social advancement (2005: 3).

The evidence in the UK for the economic marginality of Muslims is stark. The Open Society Institute concluded, from a survey of available data in 2005 that:

Muslims in the UK ... are disproportionately represented in the most deprived urban communities and experience poor housing conditions. ... Muslim children experience high levels of the risk factors associated with child poverty. A higher proportion of working age Muslims have no qualifications than for any other faith group. Muslims are by far the most disadvantaged faith group in the British labour market. They suffer from disproportionate levels of unemployment and inactivity and are over-concentrated in certain low-paying sectors of the economy. UK Muslims report higher levels of illness than all other faith groups and fare poorly on certain health indicators (EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program, 2005: 11).

However, economic issues have not been the main visible factors which have influenced the development of Muslim political agency. Instead it was Muslim responses to issues such as segregation in education in the Honeyford affair (McLoughlin, 2005c: 56; Nielsen, 2004: 59-60) of the early 1980s, and representations of Islam in the Rushdie affair of the late 1980s (Werbner, 2002) which provided an early focus for 'Muslim' as opposed to 'Pakistani' or 'Asian' mobilization (see also, Lewis, 2002).<sup>89</sup> The development of Muslim political agency has been seen as a direct threat to multiculturalism, which has a pronounced secularist agenda. As Modood argues, 'the emergence of Muslim political agency has thrown British multiculturalism into theoretical and practical disarray' (2002: 14). The problems of multicultural policy for Muslims in particular has led to a shift in focus away from race, and towards seeing faith as a key determinant of cultural identity, especially among minority communities.<sup>90</sup> McLoughlin notes the creation of a 'faith' as well as 'race' relations

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<sup>89</sup> The Rushdie affair was of particular national and international importance, and marked the significant move towards the articulation of British Muslim identity. However, the Rushdie affair should be seen in the context of other more localised controversies, such as the Honeyford affair, which had already demonstrated the growth of Muslim political agency.

<sup>90</sup> The issue of identity in inter-faith dialogue was discussed in chapter two. There are overlaps between the issues identified there, and issues identified in writing on multiculturalism. For



industry which: 'has both shaped, and itself been influenced by, an emergent Muslim identity politics' (2005c: 66).<sup>91</sup> More significantly, the New Labour community cohesion agenda, and communitarian emphasis on responsibilities as well as rights, has provided a developing policy response to cultural diversity.<sup>92</sup>

At a local level, many British Muslim communities are geographically concentrated, as is the case in Beeston Hill, the area where the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project is based. It is in such local areas that an interesting dynamic is set up between the churches of the supposedly majority community, which have similar if not lower attendances than the places of worship of the supposedly minority community. It has already been noted in chapter two that for those who identify as Muslim religion is 'more important' than for those who identify as Christian. The 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey found that 20% of those who identified as Christians were involved in religious groups or clubs, while for example, 52% of those who identified as Jews were involved in such groups (Weller, 2005: 87). The smaller a religious community, it would appear, the greater the tendency towards religious involvement. At a local level this is significant in the provision of services. The internal channels of communication which can be found in the Muslim community are an important route through which the welfare state can seek to contact those who choose to be, or the state can find to be, hard to reach. The need to access the hard to reach is important because, as already identified, the Muslim community are disproportionately affected by deprivation and disadvantage. Whether this is in terms of education, health, housing or employment, it is a different relationship to that for the churches, which might be expected to be the vehicle for *provision* of welfare services, rather than the vehicle for state welfare services to *access* those who require provision.

The growth of religious diversity has changed fundamentally how religion and state relate to one another, and has introduced the new dimension of the way in which religions relate to one another. For both the Muslim and Christian communities, the

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instance, Baumann (1999) argues for a replacement of the concept of 'identity' with that of 'identifications' to take account of the way in which identities are both multiple and changing.

<sup>91</sup> That in 2006 key national bodies dealing with matters of faith and race have come together in the Race, Cohesion and Faith Directorate indicates the extent to which this is still a dynamic area.

<sup>92</sup> This does not mean that multiculturalism has been removed from public discourse, indeed many scholars and public commentators argue for a developed form and understanding of multiculturalism (e.g. Modood, 2007; Parekh, 2000, 2006).



growth of secularism has been a great concern, and has been seen by many outside the religious sphere as the proper aim of a modern, western, society. Indeed, one key impetus for Muslim-Christian co-working is the desire to assert a religious presence in the face of the apparent secularisation of English culture.

### 3.4. *The Secular*

Three related words are used throughout this study. *Secularism* is used to refer to the political ideology which seeks the removal of religion from the public sphere. *Secularity* is used to indicate the collection of factors such as plurality and modernity which are taken to be features of the secular. *Secularisation* refers to the growth of features of secularity. Secularisation theory has its roots in the Enlightenment, and came to the fore in the 1950s and 1960s, at the time which was identified above as the start of the rapid decline in religious attendance in English churches. The key idea of secularisation theory is that: '[m]odernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals' (Berger, 1999: 2).

The question of whether or not England is becoming more secular is not a straightforward one. The Census data from 2001 (National Statistics Online, 2003) included the religious question for the first time and demonstrated that a significant number of UK residents identify with a specific religion. Of respondents, 71.6% described themselves as Christian, with 76.8% of the population describing themselves as having a religion. Although the question was voluntary only 7.3% of respondents chose not to specify a religious affiliation. Those identifying as of 'no religion' accounted for 15.5% of the population. For some, this flies in the face of secularisation theory, which sees England as an example of a natural process of secularisation, with a decline of religious allegiance and significance. The churches particularly have been keen to use this information to support their arguments for recognition and involvement.

However, the census data hides a mountain of ambiguity, which has been evident to commentators since well before the 2001 census. Although many people in the UK are able to identify a religion as their own, Grace Davie (1994) contends that this tends to fit a pattern of 'believing without belonging'. Others argue that identifying oneself as Christian is as much about identifying what one is not, rather than what one is:

...until the census results are supported with data from other sources, we would take them to represent increasing anxiety about national identity rather than increasing commitment to the Christian faith (Voas & Bruce, 2004: 27).



Although an individual may think of a particular religious building as the natural place for rituals associated with birth, marriage or death, the attendance figures continue to decline, despite occasional increases such as that witnessed in the Church of England's statistics for 2003 (Harden, 2005).

For those such as Bruce (2002) who continue to support the 'secularisation paradigm', the evidence of personal conviction found in the 2001 census does not detract from the evidence of declining church attendance and religious social significance (2002: 105).

Bruce sees:

...secularization as a social condition manifest in (a) the declining importance of religion for the operation of non-religious roles and institutions such as those of the state and the economy; (b) a decline in the social standing of religious roles and institutions; and (c) a decline in the extent to which people engage in religious practices, display beliefs of a religious kind, and conduct other aspects of their lives in a manner informed by such beliefs (2002: 3).

Significantly for this study, which focuses on religious organisations as players outside the immediate field of religion, Bruce also states that:

Our case can be summarized as saying that religion diminishes in social significance, becomes increasingly privatized, and loses personal salience *except where it finds work to do other than relating individuals to the supernatural* (2002: 30 emphasis in original).

Whereas Bruce has maintained allegiance to the secularisation paradigm, other key thinkers have significantly changed their interpretation of the data over time, particularly when challenged by the fact of religious growth and commitment, not least in the USA (Davie, 1999: 76). Instead of seeing secularisation as the norm, with instances such as the USA as exceptional cases, they see the secularising movement in Western Europe as itself the exception to a world where modernity has provoked powerful counter-secular movements particularly in Islam and Evangelical Protestant Christianity (Berger, 1999).

Whether or not the process of secularisation is a fact or an interpretation, a global or a purely European movement, it is nonetheless the case that the questions it raises, and the presence of secularism as a political force, have had a significant impact on the way in which religion and state relate. It is undoubtedly the case that in England, despite a residual attachment to religious identity, the level of religious attendance is low within the group of people who identify with the Christian religion. For the religious leaders

and organisations, modernity and other features of secularity are a force to be challenged or to be adapted to. The growth of conservative and liberal religious militancy can be seen as obvious responses to the need to challenge or adapt (Brown, 2006: 313). For many, secularity is a threat against which religions should unite, and a reason to seek justification for the role of religion in the life of the nation and the community.<sup>93</sup> For some Christians (Newbigin et al., 1998), the way in which the Muslim community has engaged with secularity and asserted the role of religion in the public square, is seen as a challenge to re-examine Christian responses. For Leslie Newbigin, Christians are: 'under obligation to re-examine their own recent record, to repudiate their too easy accommodation to the assumptions of a secular society, and to seek afresh a vision for the future of a society shaped by the Christian gospel' (1998: 24). In arguing that a Christian society is the only way to ensure freedom of belief for all, Newbigin takes a similar perspective to those asserting the desirability of an Islamic state. Christian and Muslim voices which call for a significant role for religion in how society is run are in a minority. However, they add weight to less extreme positions which assert the importance of religion in the social and political life of the nation.

Although many of the processes of the state have moved further away from direct links to the Church, individuals within government have sought, and do seek, to put religion back into, or maintain its presence within, the political and policy sphere. The rise of religious militancy, and recent terrorist attacks have forced religion into the public square, but it is important to recognise that the emphasis on faith communities working with policy agendas predates this situation. An overview of some of the key moments in the relationship between religion and state in recent years will demonstrate how this relationship has evolved, and identify some of the key issues in the contemporary relationship between religion and the state.

### *3.5. Key Points in the Contemporary Relationship between Religion and State*

The New Right, which had developed in the 1970s and had a significant influence on the Thatcher government, had begun to lose credibility by the start of the 1990s. The emphasis on the individual saw a growth in wealth for some, but had not led to the 'trickle down' which it was expected would benefit the poor. It was within the context of the failure of the New Right, and the failure of the Labour Party to respond

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<sup>93</sup> It is also possible to make a case that for many Christians, and indeed Muslims (Bielefeldt, 2004), a liberal interpretation of political secularism is the only way to ensure freedom of religion in a multi-religious context.



adequately during the 1970s and 1980s, that the political movement of New Labour gathered momentum. Unpopular to both 'old' Labour and the traditional Conservative following, the New Labour 'Third Way' project nevertheless gained power by consensus building and a careful balancing of the individual and the state:

...the development of a new political language about social cohesion, stakeholding, community, social exclusion and inclusion was central to the creation of the 'centre-left consensus' on which New Labour's electoral success was presumed to depend (Levitas, 1998: 2).

Religion, whether through the personal conviction of New Labour politicians or because of its resources and location, has become part of this consensus building.

In the context of the perceived failure of 'communities', especially after the 2001 riots, the state has launched neighbourhood renewal and community cohesion strategies, in order to try to rebuild a past, and probably mythical, golden age of cohesive and effective communities. Part of this effort has included an attempt to build, and capitalise on, the social capital of religious groups.<sup>94</sup> Church social action projects have sought and achieved public funding, as increasingly have projects from other faith-based organisations. Local, regional and national government strategies have sought to access communities through religious leaders or representatives, a path strewn with pitfalls. Whereas religion may have been seen as a privatised and thus neutralised affair, a traditional English Christian model of religious observance, there has been an increasing political awareness of the saliency of religion in local communities. As well as politicians who seek to bring their personal faith to bear on their work, and the rise of religious identity within multicultural discourse, there is also a growing sense of religions as a natural pathway into communities with which the state struggles to engage, and a natural source of social capital to further policy objectives.

The changing political climate, where religion is both more acceptable in government, but also more important for attaining policy goals, has led to a subtle change in the traditional relationship between religion and state. The question of the establishment or otherwise of the Church of England is not as important in neighbourhoods as the fact of funding for projects, or opportunities to be involved in consultation. The concept of religion, as a matter for the private sphere with historical involvements in the machinery

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<sup>94</sup> Although writing with regard to the American situation, and not specifically about religion, a key text on social capital is Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000).

of the state, has changed to a relationship between religion and the state based on a degree of mutual need. It is possible to identify a variety of different points when the present relationship between religious groups and the state have shown a marked development or clarification. Below, ten moments in particular are identified for brief consideration. At each of these junctures, which do not necessarily represent a sequential development, important issues have been raised, or demonstrated, about how government, particularly the present Labour government, relates to the faith communities of England. Through these ten points a new formation can be seen to have evolved, in which the faith communities are represented as key players in opinion formation, strategic development and even the delivery of policy objectives.

### *The Founding of the Inter Faith Network for the UK<sup>95</sup>*

The Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFNUK) was founded in 1987 and is significant because of its role in promoting inter-faith activity and instigating a variety of activities which are much broader than what might traditionally be thought of as inter-faith work.<sup>96</sup> One commentator has stated that:

The inception and development of the Inter Faith Network for the UK has provided a major catalyst in the transformation of inter-faith initiatives from what were, historically, relatively marginal initiatives into a central feature of the contemporary religious landscape of England and the UK (Weller, 2005: 114).

In its newsletter, the IFNUK describes itself as working ‘with its member bodies to promote good relations between the faith communities in the UK, to combat inter religious prejudice and intolerance and to help make the UK a country marked by mutual understanding and respect between religions where all can practise their faith with integrity’ (Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2007b). In 2007 there were 112 religious, inter-faith, educational and academic organisations affiliated with the IFNUK. Religions represented include minority groups such as Zoroastrians and Unitarians, and multiple groups from each of the major religions, for instance seven Muslim bodies are affiliated (Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2007c). Pagans and many new religious movements are not represented.

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<sup>95</sup> The IFNUK virtually always uses the word ‘faith’ instead of ‘religion’. This is an important example of the dominance of this form of terminology.

<sup>96</sup> Most significantly, the IFNUK does not focus on theology, which is a key issue traditionally associated with inter-faith fellowship groups.



As well as linking member organisations IFNUK identifies five areas of work: providing information, advising, publishing relevant material, fostering co-operation and holding regular meetings to discuss matters of concern (Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2007b). Publications cover a range of topics including local inter-faith projects, religion and citizenship, and working with local government. The range of bodies these publications have been published with is equally broad, including the Citizenship Foundation, the Inner City Religious Council, the Commission for Racial Equality, and the Association of Chief Police Officers. IFNUK has also been a partner in the publication of documents by other bodies, including the Local Government Association and the Home Office. This range of partners and publications indicates the degree to which the IFNUK has become significant to how the state relates to religion. Although there are other avenues by which the voice of religion is heard in government, IFNUK is important in providing an independent body which places the concept of inter-faith on the agenda of state agencies approaching faith communities.

#### *The Formation of the Inner Cities Religious Council*

The Inner Cities Religious Council (ICRC) was created as part of the then Department of Environment in 1992. The body was agreed in 1991 between the government and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey (Department for the Environment Transport and the Regions, 1997). It is claimed that this agreement was a direct response to the concerns arising from the inner city disturbances of the 1980's, partially articulated by the Church of England in its *Faith in the City* report (Smith, 2003; Taylor, 2002). Significantly for the present discussion, the formation of the ICRC demonstrates that the move to include religion in understanding and responding to the needs of local communities predates the election of New Labour in 1997. The Conservative government made this first important step in inviting religion into government beyond the utilisation of the Church of England as the civic religion of England.

Having been part of the DETR, the ICRC became part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the late 1990s, and its secretariat was based in the Urban Policy Directorate. The secretariat moved to the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (still within ODPM) in April 2004, which became part of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) which was established in May 2006. Representatives of the Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh religions met 'to work with the Government on issues of regeneration, neighbourhood renewal, social inclusion, and other relevant



cross-departmental policies and processes' (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, 2005). Although not above criticism,<sup>97</sup> the strategic role of the ICRC formed one among many routes in government where religious voices began to be heard *as faith community representatives* rather than as people who happened to be of a particular religion.

As part of the move into the DCLG the ICRC<sup>98</sup> was replaced by the Faith Communities Consultative Council. The description of this body is subtly different from that of the ICRC, demonstrating the way the language of government and policy priorities have changed.

The FCCC is a non statutory body; it aims to provide a national forum, chiefly concerned with issues related to cohesion, integration, the development of sustainable communities, neighbourhood renewal, and social inclusion.

The Council also has general oversight on engagement between central Government and faith communities (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006).

The inclusion of the term 'integration' possibly represents a different approach to expectations of how religions relate to society. The word 'religion' has now been replaced entirely by the word 'faith', an important but subtle shift.

*Tony Blair's Speech to the Christian Socialist Movement, March 2001*

Tony Blair's 2001 speech to the Christian Socialist Movement (CSM) is an articulation of the relationship between religion and state which New Labour sought to develop. Blair, as Prime Minister, made no secret of his personal faith, which has been a subject of discussion and satire (K. Ahmed, 2003). Although confirmed as an Anglican while at University, Blair attended Roman Catholic Mass with his family throughout his time as Prime Minister, and famously converted to Roman Catholicism after he left office. One biographer describes Blair's faith as: 'open-minded, tolerant of human frailties, and respectful of Jewish and Muslim teaching' (Stephens, 2004: xvii). Stephens links this underpinning theology to the important role of concepts of community and obligation in Blair's political philosophy, particularly that: 'self realization depends on partnership with and trust of others' (2004: 18).<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Members of the Anglican clergy were the key leaders in the ICRC, and it was based within Government. It is relatively easy to critique the 'establishment' nature of the ICRC. However, Taylor notes that: 'the articulation of minority religious issues at ICRC meetings and conferences has largely driven the agendas' (2003: 126).

<sup>98</sup> And the 'Working Together' Steering Group of the Home Office

<sup>99</sup> Blair, along with his successor Gordon Brown and others, appear to have been heavily influenced by 'communitarianism' (Phillips, 1994). This emphasis on the reinvigoration of



In this speech Blair emphasises how religious values underpin political action. He highlights the role of faith groups in the local community, and their role in partnership with the state. He seeks to be inclusive of all religions, and in large part simply states key policy areas for the government while linking them to values of 'equal worth, responsibility, community'. Greg Smith identifies three key themes in the speech:

Firstly his version of Christianity is an open and inclusive one, committed to diversity and social inclusion. Secondly he expresses an almost naïve optimism that the diversity of religion in the UK will foster social cohesion rather than conflict. Finally he credits faith in general as a key driver of altruism, and therefore the source of valuable voluntary community and charitable action (2004: 193).

Although Blair was not the only recent Prime Minister to express a religious identity, he was the first to lead a series of policy initiatives such as partnership working with religious groups, and legislation on religious discrimination. That there are individuals within government promoting faith communities as a potential partner, and basing their own actions and decisions on their faith commitments as much as their political commitments, brings religion and specifically Christianity to the fore. However, this situation is not without its critics and the fact that there are politicians who are perceived to bring their faith to bear on their work 'raises uncomfortable questions about their reinforcement of the cultural hegemony of a minority religion in a multicultural, multifaith and largely secular society' (Levitas, 1998: 105). This was particularly demonstrated with the controversy over the appointment of Ruth Kelly MP, a member of the Roman Catholic movement, Opus Dei, to the position of Secretary of State for Education in January 2005 (BBC, 2005; Parris, 2005).

### *The 2001 'Riots' and the Development of a Community Cohesion Agenda*

The 2001 disturbances demonstrated that many issues raised by the *Faith in the City* report in 1985 remained significant. In the context of communitarian political philosophy, the decline in community cohesion was considered to have led to the 2001

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responsibilities alongside rights, and of the nurturing of strong community bonds (Etzioni, 1998) is apparent in government policy. The Scottish philosopher of religion John Macmurray, who was writing and broadcasting from the 1930s to the 1960s, has been considered to be a key influence on the political thought of Blair, and his output has similarities to the writings of communitarians such as Etzioni. However, Macmurray's commitment to material equality does not sit easily within the communitarian rhetoric about obligations and responsibilities which have been identified as more prevalent in New Labour pronouncements (Levitas, 1998: 121). Equally, it has been argued that Macmurray's concept of community is significantly different to that espoused by Tony Blair and New Labour (McIntosh, 2007).



riots. Addressing this decline became a central policy area,<sup>100</sup> as was demonstrated by the 2002 Local Government Association (LGA) document *Guidance on Community Cohesion* which draws on the principal reports on the 2001 disturbances (Cantle, 2001; Denham, 2002).<sup>101</sup> The reports only use 'faith' as a word among others when describing communities, and focuses instead on ethnicity. In the LGA guidance however, faith communities warrant a section of their own (Local Government Association, 2002: 21).

The LGA guidance identifies that: 'Faith can be a powerful factor in personal and community identity' and that local government should 'foster understanding and respect between different faith traditions'. Local authority cohesion strategies should challenge stereotypes based on religion. The guidance notes that faith communities: 'often provide significant forms of association at the local level and can offer a wide range of services from their place of worship' and that this can be important in 'delivering mainstream service in a culturally sensitive way'. Local inter-faith structures are also mentioned as valuable in 'promoting mutual understanding and cooperation' as well as providing a 'mechanism for consultation by the local authority and other public bodies' (Local Government Association, 2002: 21). The guidance focuses on what the faith communities can *deliver*; in a way that appropriates 'faith communities', an undefined term, to the agenda of local and national government. Concern over the extent to which religion is being co-opted to the community cohesion agenda was expressed at the IFNUK national meeting in 2002 which addressed community cohesion. In the record of proceedings it is noted that:

...participants expressed a strong view that faith communities should not simply be co-opted to the agenda of central or local government in ways that could undercut their integrity and their traditional role within society as a source of spiritual strength and values (Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2002: 1).

Indarjit Singh of the Network of Sikh Organisations, himself a member of the ICRC, commented that there needs to be clarity about community cohesion. He noted that:

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<sup>100</sup> In 2004 the Home Office Community Cohesion Unit was responsible for developing this policy agenda, particularly in the Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme. There was also an inter-departmental Community Cohesion Programme Board, and an independent Community Cohesion Panel, with Practitioner Groups focusing on policy areas including faith (Home Office, 2004). Locally, authorities are required by the Local Government Act 2000 to have a 'community strategy' (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2000). This, not exhaustive, array of groups and strategies around community cohesion illustrates the significance of this agenda in 2004.

<sup>101</sup> The Cantle report represents an independent perspective on the issues, unlike the Denham report which was produced by an inter-departmental group of Ministers.



Too much cohesion in a minority community can lead to a ghetto mentality. Too much cohesion in a majority community can lead to jingoistic attitudes. Hatred and prejudice are powerful binding factors, and we need to look carefully at those ideas and attitudes that we want to bind us (Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2002: 16 emphasis in original).

For faith communities there is clearly a need to question the basis and implications of the community cohesion strategy.

### *Formation of New National Faith-based Organisations*

At a national level, specific organisations have come into existence to better facilitate dialogue and co-working between faith(s) and state. There was a particular growth in this area in 2001/2, shortly after both the 11<sup>th</sup> September bombings of New York, and the disturbances in English towns. Importantly, these new organisations represent a professionalisation of the faith-based sector, more akin to that seen in the Voluntary and Community Sector.

FaithRegenUK is a Muslim-led organisation founded in 2001. The 2003 newsletter identified five major faiths represented on the faith advisory panel (FaithRegenUK, 2003: 1). The organisation has been primarily involved in training for religious leaders, supporting organisations and individuals involved in regeneration and social enterprise projects, and producing resources including electronic kiosks for places of worship with information about benefits and other public information issues. The organisation uses policy language related to social exclusion, community cohesion and urban regeneration; and works with public bodies such as JobCentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council, raising funding both from these and from faith communities.

Faithworks is a Christian organisation which does not seek multifaith working, although it works alongside other faiths when appropriate. The Faithworks website identifies the Faithworks Movement as a group of individuals, networks and denominations: 'working towards empowering and inspiring individual Christians and every local church to develop their role at the hub of their community' (Faithworks, 2005). Launched in 2001 around a campaign to promote the role of faith organisations to government, it was inspired by the Evangelical minister Steve Chalke. It produces resources and services as well as campaigning, for instance, on the 'Genuine Occupational Requirement' component of the 2003 employment legislation. The funding for Faithworks appears to come entirely from the membership. Faithworks is a

response to the contemporary potential for relationship between faith and state, although as a campaigning body it provides something of a critical voice to the government's response to faith, whereas FaithRegenUK is more concerned with staying within the government's own parameters of the relationship.

Unlike the previous two examples the Faith Based Regeneration Network (FbRN) is not an organisation itself, but a network of existing organisations. Originally funded through the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Special Grants Programme, and by the Church Urban Fund, it was established in 2002. The Network was established 'by and for regeneration practitioners who identify with faith traditions, or who work with or for faith community organisations' (FbRN, 2003). As well as producing a newsletter and organising conferences, the FbRN also published a 'Toolkit' for practitioners of faith based regeneration (R. Ahmed, Finneron, & Singh, 2004). That there is considered to be a need for a national organisation to network faith based regeneration organisations and practitioners gives some idea of the level of activity in this area.

These three organisations demonstrate the growing capacity of the 'faith-sector' to respond to policy agendas on the policy maker's own terms. However, these organisations have a national remit. Their relevance on the ground in Beeston Hill was very limited. The only contact I was aware of during my fieldwork was the installation of an electronic kiosk in the Building Blocks centre which provided information on training, benefits and other issues. I did not see the kiosk in use, and it was eventually removed at the request of the Building Blocks centre.

#### *Faith Communities Unit*

The Faith Communities Unit (FCU) was established in 2003 as part of the Home Office. Concerned with government engagement with faith communities, promoting cohesion between faith communities and promoting the significance of faith in the voluntary and community sector, it was argued that '[o]ver the coming years the FCU will play a crucial role in acting as intermediary between the government and faith communities' (R. Ahmed et al., 2004). However, the FCU was renamed the Cohesion and Faiths Unit, and became part of the Race, Faith and Cohesion Directorate before being moved from



the Home Office to the DCLG in 2006. That it has changed name and location within a relatively short time indicates that it has not easily settled into a clear role.<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps the most significant part of the work of the FCU was the publication of the report *Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities*, published in February 2004 (Faith Communities Unit, 2004). The steering group consisted of Ministers and faith representatives.<sup>103</sup> The report 'makes a number of recommendations, for the attention of Government Departments and the faith communities' (2004: 1). The recommendations cover national consultations by departments, advice to faith communities, events and celebrations, local and regional consultations by departments, and central consultative arrangements. In terms of the development of the state's relationship with faith communities it is useful to note that, in response to lobbying from humanists and secularists, the *Working Together* report specifically identifies that governmental departments should consult and contact humanists and secularists when consulting or contacting faith groups, and also include these groups in their contacts. There is also a recommendation that '[e]valuation of the impact of this report shall include consideration of whether there is any evidence of disadvantage to those who do not hold religious beliefs' (2004: 4). This is evidence of the growing critique of state relationships with faith communities.

### *Religious Discrimination Legislation*

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations came into force from 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2003. They form part of a raft of new legislation in line with European Union common legal frameworks; other regulations exist on sexual orientation and age. The second part of the Equality Act 2006 extended the regulations to cover discrimination in the delivery of services as well as in the field of employment. Before this legislation was enacted, religious discrimination in the UK was principally dealt with under Race Relations legislation.<sup>104</sup> This legislation only specified Judaism and Sikhism as they were held to be ethnic, rather than religious, groups. Unlike the common law of

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<sup>102</sup> There were some apparent similarities between the objectives of the ICRC and the FCU, although ICRC was representing faith communities whereas the FCU was a body of civil servants. Given this important difference it is nevertheless interesting that the FCU did not appear to significantly cross refer to the ICRC. Now that both are part of the DCLG, the ICRC as the new Faith Communities Consultative Council, and the FCU as the new Cohesion and Faiths Unit, it will be interesting to see if the ways in which the two work together become clearer.

<sup>103</sup> It was this steering group which joined with the ICRC to form the new FCCC.

<sup>104</sup> Separate and specific legislation exists pertaining to the issues peculiar to Northern Ireland.



blasphemous libel, which only covers Christianity, the new legislation covers all forms of religion and belief and may potentially extend to cover non-religious beliefs, such as vegetarianism, which are similar to religious beliefs (ACAS, 2006).<sup>105</sup>

A significant part of the findings related to religion from the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey were pertaining to responses to religious discrimination (O'Beirne, 2004). The report indicates that: 'most respondents thought the government and employers were doing about enough but a sizeable minority thought they were not doing enough'. Other reports highlighted different areas of concern. The 2001 Religious Discrimination in England and Wales report (Weller, Feldman, & Purdam, 2001) found concerns over ignorance and indifference, pressure to conform, hostility and violence, discriminatory organisational policy and practice, and misrepresentation and stereotyping. Muslim, Hindu and Sikh organisations reported highest levels of concerns, with Muslims identifying a worsening of the situation over the previous five years. The overlap between racial and religious discrimination was recognised (Weller et al., 2001: vi-ix). The earlier Runnymede Trust report on Islamophobia (1997) identified considerable discrimination against Muslims, including violence. The religious discrimination legislation, although European led, is intended to deal with some of these concerns. Although not yet as all-encompassing as the research findings may suggest is required, the legislation demonstrates the importance of the growth of religious diversity. It represents another facet to the way the state has responded to the changing nature of religion and faith communities in England in recent years. The introduction of this legislation also demonstrates the way in which there has been a shift from identifying communities and individuals on racial or ethnic grounds, towards recognising the variety of 'identifications'.

#### *Launch of the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund*

The Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund was launched in January 2005 and is administered by the Community Development Foundation, a 'non-departmental public body supported by Communities and Local Government' (Community Development Foundation, 2007). The fund supports 'Faith-based groups whose work promotes understanding and dialogue' (Home Office, 2006) and in its first round provided £7.5 million for community work. A further funding round for 2007/2008 is expected to make a further £5 million available. This new fund is especially relevant to the present

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<sup>105</sup> Blasphemous libel is to be repealed in 2008.



study because one of the major issues for faith-based organisations in seeking state funding for their work has been the perceived difficulty in convincing funding bodies that faith-based organisations are valid groups to fund. This issue will be discussed below in chapter eight, and the local ramifications of issues around funding faith-based organisations will be explored. However, at a national level it is important that a decision was taken to provide a funding stream devoted to the faith-based sector. This both recognises the potential ability of faith-based organisations to deliver on community cohesion policy agendas, but also demonstrates some awareness of the specific problems for faith-based organisations in making successful bids to existing funds. Whether the capacity building fund creates more problems, in sidelining faith-based organisations to this funding stream, or raises the profile of faith-based organisations in general is difficult to predict and not yet possible to ascertain.

### *7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 London Bombings*

The events so far itemised as significant in the changing relationship between faith and state from the early 1990s to the present day have all been organisational and part of an expected pattern of development and response. Like the 2001 riots, the suicide bombings in London on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 represent a significant moment in the relationship between religion and state in the contemporary period when a sudden event has forced a new response and a change in the balance of relationships. The 2001 riots forced 'community cohesion' onto the public consciousness, and provided added impetus for a new policy agenda. In the same way the 2005 bombings have challenged the multiculturalist policy agenda, and have led to new policy responses around 'integration' and 'challenging extremism' which focus on religion rather than ethnicity as important identities. Although the bombings represent a moment of extreme conflict between an expression of religion and the state, the response from both government and Muslim organisations demonstrated a growing understanding and relationship between the Muslim community and the machinery of the state. For instance, bodies which had for some time been seen as representative, such as the Muslim Council of Britain, became less favoured by the state as they were seen to have failed to actively address the problems within the Muslim community. The ramifications of the bombings for Beeston Hill are a significant aspect of the fieldwork findings and are discussed below in chapter seven.

*The 2006 Publication of the Faithful Cities Report*

The significance of the 1985 publication of the *Faith in the City* report has already been identified. It laid the foundations for the Church of England's response to issues of social and economic equality, as well as marking a key moment of distance from the Thatcher government of the day. In 2006 a follow up report was published: *Faithful Cities – A call for celebration, vision and justice*. It had very little impact on public awareness compared to the original report, but nevertheless demonstrates some of the key issues, as perceived by the church, in urban life. It also demonstrates how society and the role of religion have changed in the twenty years since the original report.

Unlike *Faith in the City*, the *Faithful Cities* report has much more focus on the presence of other religions, and is positive about the role and saliency of religion in modern Britain:

...faith is now a more dynamic and significant factor in our cities than it was 20 years ago. Not only has the Church Urban Fund ... catalysed Christian engagement in our urban centres, but now there is a broader contribution, for instance of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities, than previously. And today the Government recognizes the uniquely significant role of faith communities in social cohesion, education and regeneration (Commission on Urban Life and Faith, 2006a: 1-2).

The report makes recommendations under the headings 'Faithful Capital', 'Wealth and Poverty', 'Equity in Diversity', 'Partnership', 'Young People' and the 'Church Urban Fund'. A key concept which is used and developed is that of 'faithful capital', the social capital which is peculiar to the faith-based organisations. Unlike the original report which was seen as oppositional to the political climate of the time, the *Faithful Cities* report seems much less critical. Areas where it does criticise government policy include the lack of a living wage, the treatment of asylum seekers, the problems of faith-based organisations being co-opted to policy strategies, or too many demands being placed upon them. Although the report argues that: 'faithfulness demands a critical rather than a docile partnership with the agencies of regeneration and development whoever they might be' (Commission on Urban Life and Faith, 2006b: 5), the level of critique is not on a par with that of *Faith in the City*. The *Faithful Cities* report, and its distinctiveness from the original *Faith in the City* report, is useful in indicating the degree to which the church, although still keen to be critical, is broadly in agreement with the direction of public policy. Of course, an alternative reading of the situation might be that the church



has found it useful to adopt the language and direction of the state, given a presently favourable climate.

These moments in the contemporary relationship between religion and state have demonstrated an important range of issues, including the status of 'inter-faith' activities in state-faith relations, the concern with religion in response to specific instances of unrest such as the 2001 disturbances and the 2005 bombings, the perceived role of politicians' personal faith in promoting religion as an important issues, the variety of attempts by the state to seek representation and consultation with faith communities such as the ICRC or the FCU, and some of the responses by faith communities, particularly the *Faithful Cities* report and the formation of new national faith-based organisations. Each of the these features of the dominant discourse of faith and state will be seen to be significant, to a greater or lesser extent, in the demotic discourse of faith and state discussed in chapter eight.

### *3.6. Implications for Faith Communities of the Political Context*

There are some significant criticisms and concerns about how the state, specifically at a national level, interacts with faith communities. These include concerns over whether the state is truly seeking co-operation with faith groups or simply the co-option of the resources of the faith community to the state's agenda, as well as concerns over whether, in seeking to do business with faith communities, the significant number of people who are not active members of faith communities may be disadvantaged. However, there is also the potential for more theological concerns over how religion and state relate to one another, given the different ways in which the relationship is traditionally formulated:

For Christians the State exists to enact judgement and to protect the mission of the Church. For Muslims the State is the instrument of the achievement of righteousness, and its embodiment. For the secularized state, its attitude to religions is one of neutrality (Taylor, 2002: 29).

For both Muslims and Christians, there is an issue around how to respond to the state, and to one another in the face of the opportunities that arise from the state's agenda to develop relationships with faith communities. Individuals can not expect to work with other religions, and with a state funding agenda, without being forced to question, analyse, and develop in their own faith and theology. An unreflective response to the situation can lead to conflict and confusion, particularly among those who are not

directly involved in the running and planning of projects. The fieldwork outcomes and conclusions in chapter eight will evidence how the national policy agenda impacts on faith communities at the local level. In order to situate this fieldwork it is now necessary to move on to a detailed overview of the local context.



**Chapter 4: The Local Context: ‘Faith Together in Leeds 11,  
Beeston Hill, South Leeds**

The significance of local context is often overlooked in studies of Muslim-Christian dialogue, where global issues are given priority. The importance of understanding the empirical reality of the local context where Christians and Muslims meet is emphasised by Willem Bijlefeld, who argues that:

The study of the regional context is therefore not, as it were, an appendix to a previously established theological construct of what Christian-Muslim encounter entails, but an analysis of the empirical reality in which Muslims and Christians co-exist and meet each other (or fail to do so), and, as such, the only basis for a responsible and meaningful agenda for Muslim-Christian dialogue (1995: 17).

Understanding the local context is important not only for situating the fieldwork, but for understanding the issues affecting, and the nature of, the potential and actual dialogue between Muslims and Christians which occurs there. This chapter therefore provides a description of Beeston Hill and the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project, and a spatial analysis of the community centres which form the heart of Faith Together in Leeds 11, and the basis for the fieldwork.

#### *4.1. Mapping the Area: Beeston Hill*

Beeston Hill is an ethnically and religiously diverse and socially and economically disadvantaged area located to the south of Leeds city centre. It is part of a larger area known as Beeston, and is sometimes known as ‘Cross Flatts’. Beeston village is to the west of Beeston Hill, and is separated from it by Cross Flatts Park. Beeston Hill is separated from Holbeck to the north by the M621 motorway, which links the centre of Leeds to the M1 motorway. Beeston and Beeston Hill are residential areas with several small parades of shops and a small number of offices. There is a large retail complex ‘The White Rose Centre’ just beyond Beeston on the A653. There are libraries and information centres both in Beeston, and on the Dewsbury Road (A653) in Beeston Hill. There are several primary schools in the Beeston and Beeston Hill areas, and South Leeds High School is located in Beeston.<sup>106</sup> The area is well served with General

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<sup>106</sup> South Leeds High School was created in 2004 by the merger of two former High Schools, one largely white and one with a significant number of ethnic minority pupils, in response to falling student numbers. The school experienced significant problems with discipline and violence in September 2005, which was attributed by the head teacher to problems associated with loyalty to previous schools, as well as of relationships between pupils of different ethnicities. Any relationship to the London bombings of that summer was not alluded to in the

Practitioner's medical practices and health centres. Some employment is provided by local businesses but the area is also an easy commute by public transport or car into central Leeds and beyond. Places of worship in the Beeston area include several mosques, a Gurdwara, and churches of various denominations including Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic and United Reformed. There are also groups such as the Jesus Army and Church Africa which meet locally but do not have their own places of worship.

Historically, the Beeston Hill and Holbeck residential areas provided the workers for local industry. Coal mining took place in the eighteenth century, but the area developed rapidly in the nineteenth century with a range of industry including foundries, chemical works, textile mills and railway engineering. Beeston Hill, like the rest of the city of Leeds, flourished during the Industrial Revolution but has been significantly affected by the loss of heavy industry from the area. Although Leeds has experienced strong economic growth as a centre for the service and finance sector, this prosperity has yet to impact on residential inner-city areas such as Beeston. In response to the level of multiple deprivations experienced in the area of Beeston Hill and Holbeck the area became a Neighbourhood Renewal Area in 2003, having been an SRB4 area for five years previously.<sup>107</sup> Money from the public and private sector, as well as a partnership strategy, the 'Leeds Initiative',<sup>108</sup> has been used in order to try and tackle some of the problems of the local area. In 2005 it was claimed that between 2000 and 2007 £86 million would be invested in regeneration in Beeston Hill and Holbeck (Neighbourhood Renewal Team, 2005).

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press coverage. On 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007 it was reported by the BBC that relationships within the school had significantly improved (BBC News, 2007). However, the school continues to have significant difficulties as it has been placed in 'special measures' by the Office for Standards in Education, and has financial difficulties, as reported in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* (Rosser, 2007).

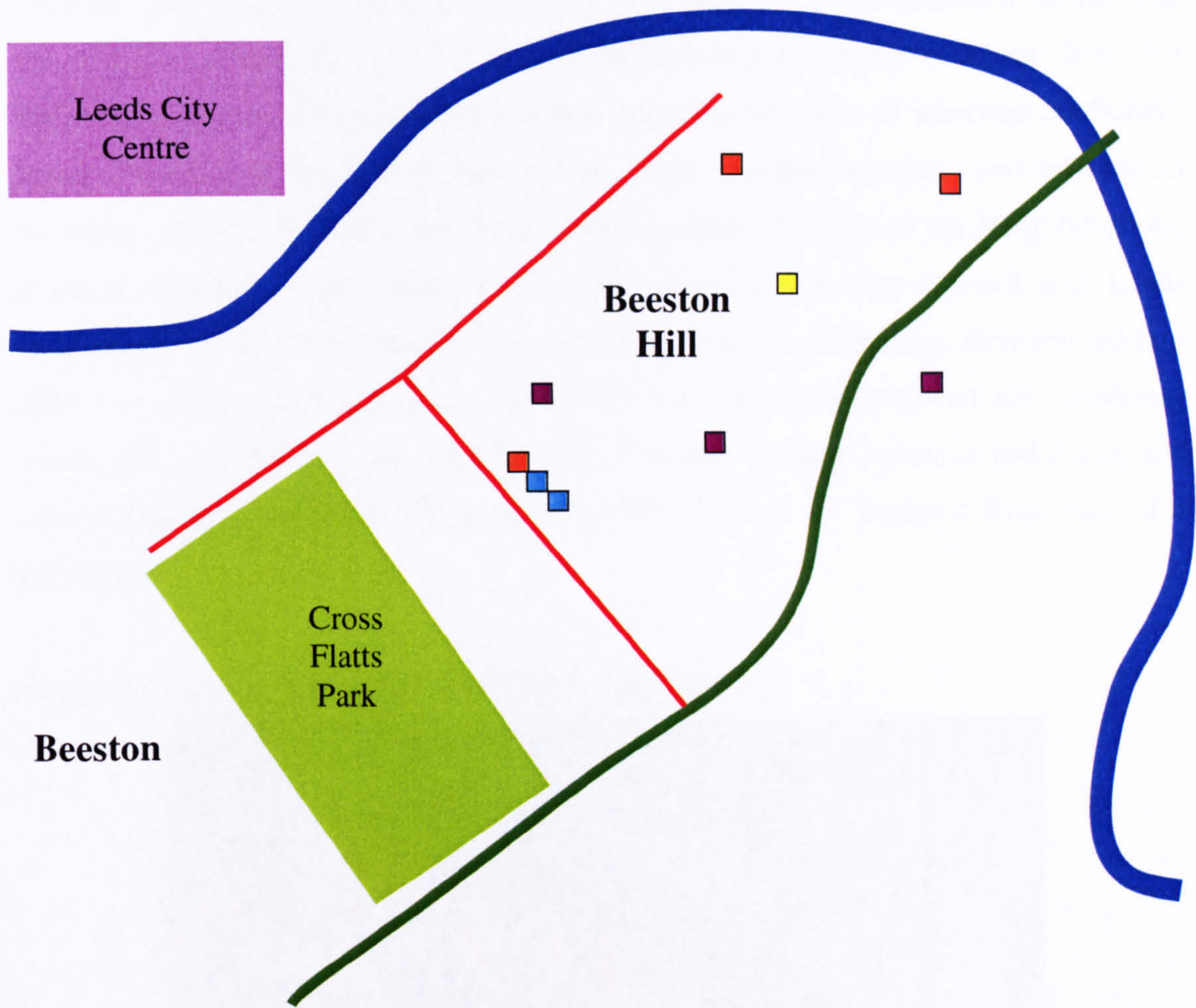
<sup>107</sup> The Single Regeneration Budget was government funding, launched in 1994, aimed at regenerating disadvantaged communities. The money was released in four rounds, hence the title 'SRB4' for the last round.

<sup>108</sup> This includes a broad range of organisations and groups including the Employment Service, Further Education colleges, Leeds' City Council, Leeds Health Authority and West Yorkshire police.



Figure 1: A Map Showing Some of the Key Features of the Beeston Hill Area

Illustrative only – not to scale



Key

■ Hamara and Building Blocks Centres

■ Mosques

■ Churches

■ Gurdwara

— significant local roads

— A653

— M621



One important area of regeneration has been the housing stock. The standard of accommodation in the area round Tempest Road, where this study is focused, is poor, mainly consisting of dilapidated nineteenth century terraced 'back-to-back' buildings, characteristic of the properties built by speculators for the workers from the surrounding industries. Although it is not without charm the housing has not, on the whole, been well maintained, and the original quality of construction was not necessarily good (Horner, 2003). In the 'middle layer super output area'<sup>109</sup> the proportion of homes that are rented is nearly three times the proportion found nationally (National Statistics Online, 2001a), and there are known to be a significant number of 'absentee landlords'. Boarded up houses, rubbish dumped in alleyways, overgrown gardens and dilapidated buildings are not an uncommon sight in Beeston Hill. As part of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, some effort has been made by Leeds City Council and Leeds Federated Housing Association to improve the appearance of housing. Between autumn 2003 and spring 2004 properties facing onto Tempest Road received new boundary walls, gates and railings, new front gardens, painting of timber windows and doors, and new guttering. The area in front of a parade of shops on Tempest Road was also improved.

Figure 2: Photograph of a Typical Street in Beeston Hill



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<sup>109</sup> This is a category used by National Statistics to identify a small area, in this case, slightly smaller and therefore more specific than the City and Hunslet ward data.



However, socio-economic factors as well as environmental factors are also important in the levels of deprivation experienced in the area. The 'lower layer super output area' statistics show that in the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004, the area was ranked at 162 out of 32,482 in England, where one was the most deprived and 32,482 the least deprived (National Statistics Online, 2004). Levels of unemployment, low income and crime are high. The 2001 census showed that levels of unemployment were nearly three times those of the population of England and Wales (National Statistics Online, 2001a). Information about families receiving council administered benefits shows that in 2002 24% or more of family households in Beeston were in receipt of benefits, over four times the average for Leeds (Leeds City Council, 2002b). In order to address these concerns there are a variety of community centres and training centres offering courses to assist in finding work, as well as information on accessing benefits, such as the Tempest Road 'Neighbourhood Job Shop', opened in 2004.

Related to high levels of worklessness and poverty are high levels of crime. Information about levels of domestic burglary shows that the rate in Beeston in 2002 was more than three times the average for Leeds (Leeds City Council, 2002a). In order to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour there have been a number of initiatives and projects. These have included the appointment of neighbourhood wardens, dedicated policing partly paid for with SRB4 money, and projects to decrease business crime through improving the appearance of business areas and introducing CCTV (Neighbourhood Renewal Team, 2003). However, local statistics show there has been no continued fall in crime between the periods 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 (West Yorkshire Police Authority, 2007).

Another key feature of the Beeston Hill area is the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of the local area. As Stillwell and Phillips note, the reasons for the development and continuity of a largely South Asian community in this and other areas of Leeds are varied and include:

...the poverty of early immigrants, the desire for community living and support, the importance of access to ethnic amenities such as places of worship and community organisations and the effects of discrimination in the job and housing markets. These inner-city communities are now sustained by community ties, limited disposable income and fear of racial harassment (2006: 1149).

The 2001 Census showed that 33% of the local population identified themselves as Asian or Asian British, more than eight times the proportion in the population of Leeds,



or of England (National Statistics Online, 2001a). Of this 33%, 20% identified themselves as Pakistani, just below 10% identified as Bangladeshi, and the remaining 3% identified as Indian or other (National Statistics Online, 2001b). The Beeston Hill area has now been further diversified by a refugee and asylum seeking population from all parts of the world. The proportion of asylum seekers and refugees has risen rapidly from the second half of 2004, although due to changes in housing arrangements, numbers have dramatically fallen over the last two years. As yet, there is no statistical information available on the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees who are, or have been resident in the area. However, the diversity of this group is enormous. In Beeston Hill I have come into contact with people from Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Congo, Iraq and Sudan. Economic migrants from new European Union countries such as Romania and Poland have also added to the diversity of the area.

Although Beeston Hill was not affected by the 2001 disturbances (Cantle, 2001; Denham, 2002), the potential for conflict is nevertheless present, and the priority of 'community cohesion' for the local authority is therefore high. This set of circumstances and concerns has led to a significant financial and personnel input from local authority sources, e.g. social services, and also from nationally organised projects which focus on areas of poverty. As has already been identified, Single Regeneration Budget funding was made available for this area, and Community Chest money through the Regional Development Agency is now available. Beeston is also a Sure Start area.<sup>110</sup> The research findings will provide some commentary on this culture of initiatives and their impact and efficacy in the local area.

Historically, the principal community buildings in the heart of the residential area along Tempest Road have been the nineteenth century Trinity Methodist Church and Holy Spirit Parish Church, and their church halls. The buildings are close together on Tempest Road across a side street, Maud Avenue, from one another. Both churches have small congregations, of which several members travel in to the area rather than being immediately locally resident. The large local Muslim community however has had little physical space of its own. There are three mosques in the immediate vicinity, but they all have limited space for community groups and children's classes, and no designated space for women. Efforts to create community space in the mosques include

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<sup>110</sup> Sure Start is a nationwide project which focuses on families with children under five. The programme is concerned with improving health and educational attainment through providing activities including toddlers groups to exercise classes for parents and toddlers.



the provision of gym equipment, but this is limited. Within the context of the problems facing Beeston Hill, and the issues surrounding the availability of community space, the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project has had a significant impact on the area.

#### *4.2. Faith Together in Leeds 11*

Faith Together in Leeds 11 (summarised as 'Faith Together') was founded in 1997 as a project which focuses on 'urban regeneration' and 'community cohesion', popular priorities for government agencies in the first years of the second millennium. Most faith based urban regeneration projects in England are led by a single religious group, examples including churches which host information technology classes and childcare provision to assist the unemployed to return to work (Price, 2002). Faith Together is interesting in that it is a Muslim-Christian-secular partnership. It is unique in that it has resulted in the building of two separately owned community centres which share joint strategic management.

The impetus to reconsider the availability of community space in Beeston Hill came when the then Methodist minister (Neil Bishop) and a Muslim community worker (Hanif Malik) attended the same meeting about seeking Single Regeneration Budget funding. Bishop and Malik describe not only finding a shared vision, but also an ability to work well together.<sup>111</sup> The vision of the two was to find a way to free up this large amount of 'Christian' space for the use of the whole community, and in so doing to contribute to regeneration and cohesion and thereby improve the standard of living of the local population. This was a practical imperative driven by the spatial needs of the local Muslim community and the desire for relevance of the Christian community. It was also a religious imperative, seeking to express hospitality and co-operation from both sides. By drawing in partners from a variety of local non-religious organisations as well as the Anglican and Methodist churches, Faith Together developed over a period of several years into a broad based regeneration project. The Muslim community is involved via South Leeds Elderly and Community group (SLECG), for which Malik

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<sup>111</sup> The pivotal role of a few dedicated individuals is clear in this example. Neil Bishop and Hanif Malik both recognise that their contribution has been vital to the project getting as far as it has. Malik identified that although the organisation is now self-sustaining, Malik and Bishop, and their 'established working relationship', still provide much of the impetus. Their initial informal contact has led to a formal level of dialogue which may well create further opportunities for informal dialogue and therefore new and productive partnerships. In 2007 both Bishop and Malik left the project, Bishop permanently and Malik on an extended sabbatical. It remains to be seen what effect this will have on Faith Together in Leeds 11.



works. Partners which do not have a religious base include Vera Media, a community arts project, and the Asha centre which is a support and activity base for local South Asian women. Initial funding was from a variety of bodies, including the National Lottery, the European Union, Single Regeneration Budget, Yorkshire Forward (the Regional Development Agency), and a variety of other grant giving organisations and trusts, including church trusts.

The most visible outcome of the Faith Together vision is two community centres, Building Blocks and Hamara. Building Blocks, opened in 2003 and built around the Anglican parish hall, is owned and run by the local Methodist and Anglican churches.<sup>112</sup> Hamara, opened in 2004 and built around the former Methodist church hall, is owned and run by the Muslim community, via SLECG rather than the mosques.<sup>113</sup> Importantly however the buildings are on a long lease of twenty five years to the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project. The buildings are therefore owned separately, giving both communities a sense of ownership and anchorage through them, but at a strategic level they are run jointly, with the project leaders and the community members developing the ability to work together and share the spaces.

The Hamara centre is principally a Healthy Living Centre, offering access to health care professionals, including during 2005 a General Practitioner's medical surgery, as well as a variety of user groups.<sup>114</sup> Building Blocks is a parents' centre, offering a crèche and playgroup which often provides the childcare for those participating in the activities at Hamara. Building Blocks is also, between the hours of 6pm and 8am, and at weekends, the Methodist church building and the Anglican church hall. Both centres additionally offer classes or support groups in areas such as computing, literacy, basic skills, parenting and healthy living. Located across a side street from one another, they are visually significant, providing at the time when they were developed one of the few examples of new building in the area. As one woman commented to me at the opening of the Hamara Centre, 'The buildings make it look like someone cares about us'.

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<sup>112</sup> The co-working on the project has also led to the development of Methodist and Anglican co-working, resulting in shared worship services and increased ecumenical activity.

<sup>113</sup> Importantly, the mosques and Imams have no apparent overt role in the project, although there has been some overlap in personnel between the local mosque management committees and the Hamara board.

<sup>114</sup> Healthy Living Centres are a particular type of community centre found around the country that are charged with improving the health of neighbourhoods, working closely with the local Primary Care Trust. They are centrally funded via the National Health Service for much of their work.



Figure 3: Photograph of the Building Blocks Centre

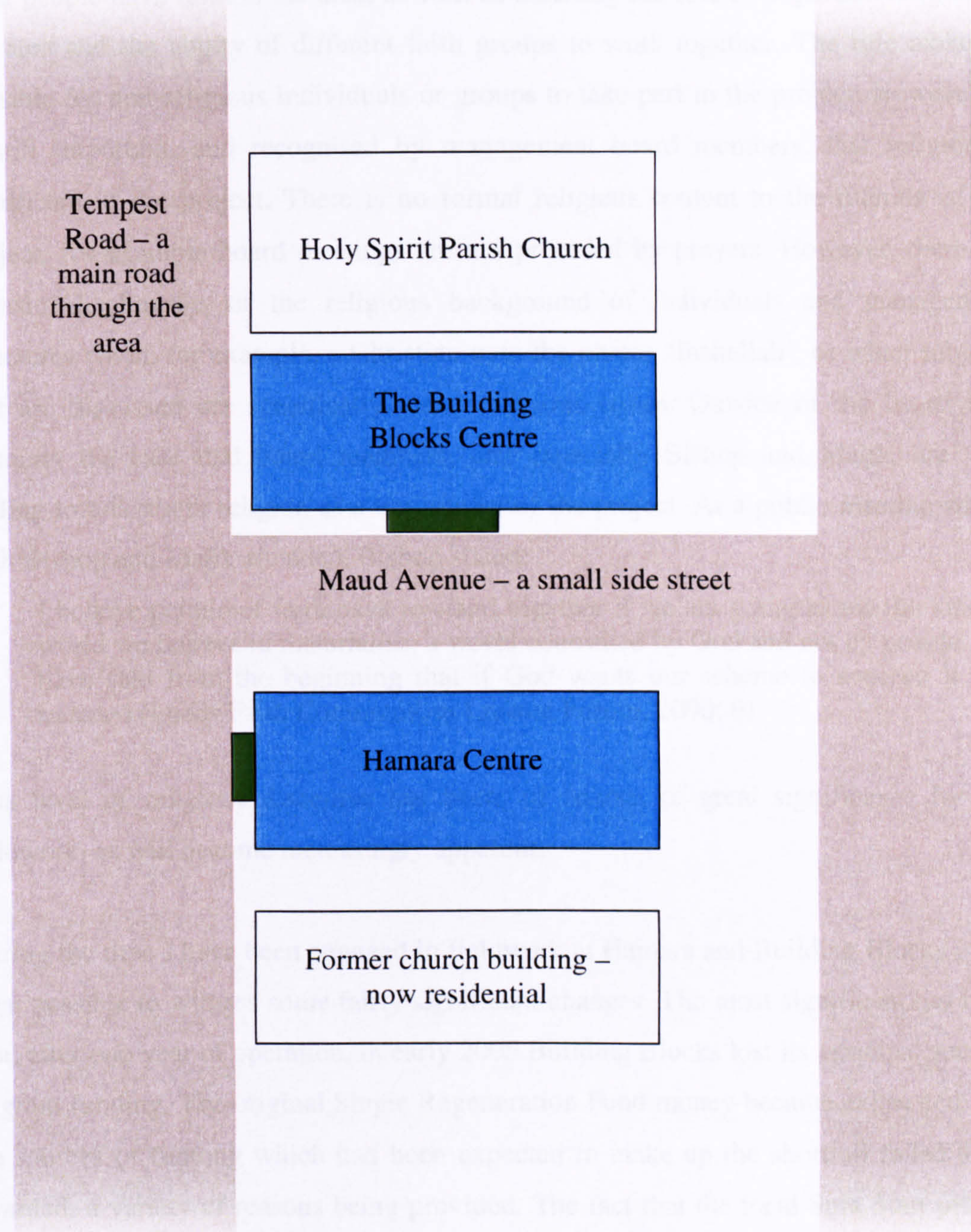


Figure 4: Photograph of the Hamara Centre





**Figure 5:** Diagram Showing the Geographical Relationship Between the Hamara and Building Blocks Centres



 Building Entrances

This diagram is illustrative only and is not to scale.



The title of the project is revealing. In Leeds people are unusually aware of postcode areas; local residents will say they live in Leeds 11 as often as they might say 'Beeston', hence the latter part of the project title. The first part of the project title 'Faith Together' is seen as very important. During my fieldwork I once made the mistake of misnaming the project Faiths Together. I was quickly corrected. The project is about asserting that local people have faith in the area, as well as asserting the role of organised religion in the area and the ability of different faith groups to work together. The title makes it possible for non-religious individuals or groups to take part in the project. However, it is still important, and recognised by management board members, that religion is significant in the project. There is no formal religious content to the running of the project, for example board meetings are not preceded by prayers. However, there are occasional glimpses of the religious background of individuals and management structures when, for example, a Christian uses the phrase 'Inshallah', or when subjects that are discussed are specifically about religious issues. Outside of the board it is certainly the case that board members, and especially Bishop and Malik, are very willing to talk about religion as a key aspect of the project. At a public meeting which both Bishop and Malik attended, Bishop stated:

I believe people of faith have to stand together if we are going to see the kind of world we believe in materialise, a world controlled by God and not by people. We have said from the beginning that if God wants our scheme to succeed it will succeed (Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum, 2000: 9).

This level of religious discourse has been, of course, of great significance for my fieldwork, as will become increasingly apparent.

During the time I have been engaged in fieldwork at Hamara and Building Blocks it has been possible to witness some fairly significant changes. The most significant has been that, after one year of operation, in early 2005 Building Blocks lost its principal sources of grant funding. The original Single Regeneration Fund money became exhausted, and the sources of funding which had been expected to make up the shortfall failed to be awarded, a variety of reasons being provided. The fact that the local Sure Start project worked on similar themes and with similar objectives is undoubtedly a factor in this funding crisis. The expectation and hope, as was outlined by an important member of Building Blocks staff in an interview, was that the Building Blocks Centre and the Sure Start project would work closely together, the Building Blocks Centre capitalising on its location in the midst of the community. That this co-working has not occurred is an area



for further exploration. The Building Blocks centre has become a private day nursery in the hope of securing sufficient income to remain open and maintain at least some of the community activities that were its core work during the first year of opening and in the period before opening.<sup>115</sup> This move towards becoming a 'social enterprise' was, it appears from interviews, always a possible outcome, as there is a move in government policy away from grant funding projects and towards assisting them to become self-sustaining. The opportunity to witness this process of change in policy direction provides one of the many unexpected aspects of my research, explored in chapter eight.

Unlike Building Blocks, Hamara continues to be in a constant process of growth, with new staff and projects emerging fairly regularly. However, it may yet reach a similar situation to that which has been reached at Building Blocks. Although to an extent protected from this at present because of the central funding it receives as a Healthy Living Centre, but also because it has core provision such as Mental Health outreach services operating out of the building, there may be a time limit on the funding that is being provided for the additional community projects. The limited time for which funding is available is a key feature of the grant-funding culture.

#### *4.3. The Significance of Space*

In order to analyse the local context in more detail a process of spatial analysis has been adopted. Nothing that occurs does so outside of time and space. It is an unavoidable fact that the buildings and project which are the focus of this research exist in a physical, as well as social and mental, space. This useful three fold typology of space as physical, mental and social has been adopted from the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991). The physical space of the buildings is more than an accidental by-product of the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project. The physical space of the buildings not only informs us about the mental processes which led to construction, but also about the local population, their lives, their expectations, and the way in which they construct personal and communal identities.

Any study which is physically located has, unavoidably, to consider the significance of space. The degree to which this is done consciously rather than coincidentally, however, will vary from study to study. It is my contention that the Faith Together space is a

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<sup>115</sup> Building Blocks began its work through running courses in the old church hall prior to the completion of the community centre.



significant factor in structuring the nature of potential and actual inter-faith and religious-secular encounter in the two centres. If the place of the study is taken to be the two buildings facing one another across the side road, then the space is that which the place contains when people use the place and make it meaningful (Knott, 2000b). It is a built, designed, owned, shared, historical place and these features impact on the space that it contains. It is also a divided space, with a secular thoroughfare running between the two buildings, which is on occasion appropriated by the community centres. Physical space is that which is contained in the place of Hamara and Building Blocks, the two community centres. It is the material space which is, perhaps, most easy to quantify and examine. Mental space however is the imagined space, the space as it is expressed and experienced, with more or less relation to the physical space. Within the community centres, the physical space I identify consists of the buildings and the road between them, although it would also be possible to quantify the physical space as extending as far as the boundaries of the local community which the centres serve. I take the mental space of the community centres to be the collection of stories, experiences and impressions that individuals communicate about the centres, and the vision and strategic goals that the management board of the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project have for the centres. The social space of the community centres is the network of relationships and interactions that occur between individuals in relation to the physical space of the buildings and the mental space of the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project. As Lefebvre argues, social relations are only transacted within space: 'Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. Their underpinning is spatial' (1991: 404). Returning to the central theme of this thesis, if inter-faith dialogue is understood as concerned with social relations, then the physical, mental and social space underpinning these relations must be implicated in their study.

The abstract, general qualities of space can be recognised alongside the particularity of the place in which it is located. Following Heidegger, Casey (1996: 24) identifies the way in which place exerts a power of gathering, a 'holding' of experiences and histories, languages and thoughts. In the Building Blocks and Hamara centres the ability of place to do this creates opportunities for believers and non-believers, Muslims and Christians, to negotiate and relate with one another away from the sometimes negative perceptions of other spaces such as places of worship. However, no space is neutral, because the experience of it can not be neutral (Tilley, 1994: 11), and neither has the creation of it been neutral. As a newly created social space (Curry, 1999: 102), as well



as physical space, the experiences and histories that are contained by the buildings are created by the objectives that the project leaders have for them, but are also in the process of being created by the experiences of those who use the centres. This tension then, between the objectives for the space, and the experiences of the space, produces some interesting and pertinent observations particularly concerning identity, ownership and encounter.

#### *4.4. Identity*

The space itself has an identity and is an arena for negotiation and exploration of issues related to religious identity, which can in this area be highly conflict laden in nature. The objectives for the centres as buildings per se are primarily about providing services in a deprived area.<sup>116</sup> However, as a project Faith Together is concerned with creating space for both communities to exist separately and assert an identity, but also come together and learn about one another's identity as well as assert a joint identity. In this section an introduction to the identity of the space will be provided, which will be developed in chapter six through the comments of interviewees and fieldwork observations.

Building Blocks is a church, but it is very quietly a church. The existence of a cross on the wall of the main room, very small signs about service times on the entrance to the building, and a very discrete cross on the roof mean that the space is created with a specific religious orientation. The space has a Christian identity but it is a space that is opened to, and used by, all sectors of the community. Hamara on the other hand is not a mosque. Although there is a prayer room, and facilities have been carefully planned to be religiously sensitive, the local mosque committees and imams do not have a part in the running of the centres, and the use of the centres by usually mosque based activities is actually minimal. Indeed, Hamara is so far from being a mosque that a black Pentecostal church has used the centre as its place of worship on a Sunday. Therefore, the only organised form of religious worship is in fact Christian. The Muslim identity of the space is expressed through the facilities and the clientele, but also through some of the activities and materials provided. There are Islamic studies classes and discussion

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<sup>116</sup> As Jamal Malik notes, 'The public sphere ... is a space in which minority institutions can represent minority interests to the wider society through active participation' (2004: 4). This applies to both the Muslim and Christian communities in Faith Together, as both are taking an active role in order to voice (and act on) their concerns for their local area.



groups which meet at the centre.<sup>117</sup> Major events in the Muslim calendar, such as Eid ul-Fitr, are celebrated in the building. Charities such as Islamic Relief have held fundraising auctions in the Hamara centre, and Muslim News and other publications are regularly available. Although this may be similar to other community centres, and this would be a fruitful area of further research beyond the limits of this study, the linking of Hamara to Building Blocks through Faith Together in Leeds 11, is unique. The Faith Together project sets Hamara in a religious rather than simply ethnic context.

Whereas Building Blocks clearly has a religious identity, Hamara's religious identity is less overt. However, Hamara is not as well used by all sectors of the population as Building Blocks. The local white population particularly only rarely use Hamara on occasions such as street markets or specific events such as an International Women's Day fair. This may be linked to the name of the centre; Hamara is an Urdu word meaning 'ours', and the types of courses and activities which are principally aimed at the South Asian population. This space, unlike Building Blocks, does not have a specific religious identity but it is mainly used by a very specific community: Pakistani Muslims. However, although Building Blocks does appear to be successfully serving a more diverse section of the local population, the number of people using Building Blocks is lower.

As will be discussed in chapter six, the fieldwork for this study provided some interesting insights into personal articulation of identity, and how they relate to dialogue between people of different religions. The individuals who use the Faith Together space differ greatly in their religious identity, the expression of that identity, and the way they relate to the identities of the two community centres. Some are very aware of the religious identity of their environment, keen to express their personal religious identity through working in the centres as volunteers, and conscious of the religious identity that others bring to the space. A significant proportion of the users however do not fall into this category. Other features of identity, including identity as a local resident but also ethnicity, class, gender, education and language, are as likely to impact on how individuals relate to each other and to the space, as their faith. However, this does not preclude negotiation around religion and inter-faith dialogue. Closely related to the

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<sup>117</sup> The Muslim groups which meet for religious purposes are principally groups which might be excluded from use of the local mosques, particularly youth and women.



identity of the Faith Together space is the issue of ownership, an important area of concern in a neighbourhood with limited resources.

Figure 6: Photographs of the Building Blocks Crosses





Figure 7: Photograph of the Hamara Prayer Room



#### *4.5. Ownership*

Building Blocks and Hamara are owned separately. Although run jointly the leaders who developed the project were motivated by a conviction from the outset that the Muslim community needed to own space in the area. This creates an interesting dynamic in which the Christian population can be seen as trying to escape ownership, of under-used and limiting space, whereas the Muslim population is trying to achieve ownership of space. There is an historical dimension to the assertion of ownership of this space. Originally, this was an Anglican and a Methodist space facing one another across the side road. Historically, two major denominations of the main religious tradition asserted their presence and their ownership both of the physical and societal space. There are now two different religious communities facing one another across this side street. The Methodists and Anglicans have come together on one side of the road in an overtly religious space, and the Muslims, less overtly, assert their ownership on the other side of the road. The road therefore becomes highly significant, it is a boundary between the two parts of the space, but it is porous. There is considerable traffic between the two sides of the space, both in terms of people moving between the buildings but also strategically and operationally in the ways in which the buildings relate to one another as community centres.



Given the potential for an apparent polarisation, it is key to the project but also to the dynamics of the space that the two centres are on a long lease to the Faith Together in Leeds 11 board, the Muslim-Christian-secular partnership that originally led to the centres being built. Whatever the present experience in terms of the use of the centres, at a strategic level the new, and apparently unique,<sup>118</sup> assertion is that in expressing a degree of shared management the buildings are less likely to act as poles to which the parts of the communities can be separately drawn, thus drawing them apart, because the two parts of the physical space are held together by the mental space of the Faith Together project. The Muslim and Christian communities can assert their right to own space, but local community leaders have chosen to make that ownership secondary to the assertion of the need for the faith communities to work together, to end what is described in policy documents as well as by individuals as the experience of 'parallel communities'. Some local residents consider this key in how the community responded to the events following the 2005 London bombings, which are discussed below in chapter seven.

As well as this issue of the faith groups 'owning' the space, the individuals who use the space also assert their ownership in terms of race, ethnicity, class and particularly, it would seem, gender. The Faith Together space often has a feminine atmosphere and the users and project workers certainly during the day, are principally female. There are plenty of practical reasons why this should be so, for instance, Building Blocks is aimed at parents, and most parents in the UK who stay at home to care for children are women. However, at Hamara it is significant that in an area where none of the mosques have a women's section, this is a 'Muslim' space which is accessible to women. In some cases, safe space has therefore been created for women to enter a social world beyond that of the family. As non-Muslim women increasingly use the centre, the opportunity to learn about another social world becomes available, in a way which would not be possible without the peculiarities of this social space. Shared ownership of the space therefore potentially and actually provides opportunities for encounter and dialogue.

#### *4.6. Encounter*

Through acting as spaces for encounter between individuals, Hamara and Building Blocks create opportunities for inter-faith dialogue and, potentially, an opportunity to

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<sup>118</sup> It has not been possible thus far to identify another project which has the key features of Muslim-Christian co-working, ownership of buildings and joint strategic management.



address causes of conflict and the aftermath of conflict.<sup>119</sup> The Christian and Muslim communities have shared the geographical area around Tempest Road in Beeston Hill for some time, but it is only with the sharing of physical space in the two community centres that concrete opportunities for the overlap of societal space become possible. Particularly notable at Building Blocks, but also apparent at Hamara, the religious identity of the space, although not significant in the way users access the buildings, with the possible exception of Muslim women, as highlighted above, does allow faith to be a justifiable topic of conversation. Issues around religious practice can be discussed and clarified in groups for parents and toddlers, or in an English class in a way that might not be possible in a space where faith was either less salient, e.g. a library or sports centre, or more salient, e.g. a church or mosque. This is particularly the case for those who are not part of a religious group, and I have observed many conversations in the centres where Muslims or Christians are asked about their practices and beliefs in a way which in other settings might be deemed inappropriate. Sahgal, in her study of Brent Asian Women's Refuge, makes some useful observations about the way women used this overtly secular space. Noting that conversations were often far removed from 'theological niceties' (1992: 187) and tended to reflect on personal experiences, she argues that: 'It is only in a secular space that women can conduct the conversation between atheist and devotee, belief and unbelief, sacred and profane, the grim and the bawdy' (1992: 197). Although this is an observation that would require further research to substantiate, I would argue that spaces such as Building Blocks or Hamara, which have secular and religious elements, offer something additional. Firstly, they offer the space for conversation between 'devotee and devotee', a category Sahgal perhaps significantly omits. Secondly, unlike the Women's Refuge, most spaces in which women come into contact with one another are visited rather than inhabited space. As such, conversation is limited by time as well as competing activities. Therefore, most secular spaces would not provide the same possibilities as the Refuge, whereas Building Blocks and Hamara, because of their peculiar identity, allow an immediacy of contact and conversation which allows difficult religious issues to be quickly broached. Interestingly, Sahgal also notes that the space of the Refuge is not entirely secular, but instead creates, 'the space to practise religion as well as challenge it' (1992: 187). It is not easy to separate the different identities a space 'holds', nor to identify the different

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<sup>119</sup> For example, local police officers holding meetings at Hamara to deal with the aftermath of the murder of an Afro-Caribbean youth by an Asian gang, and multiple agencies using the buildings as venues for meetings after the July 2005 London bombings.



responses which different spaces might elicit.<sup>120</sup> Clearly, this would be a fruitful area for further research.

Easier to identify is the way in which the religious dimension to the buildings has led to a 'formal' inter-faith dialogue group being established, and the way in which other, larger scale inter-faith meetings seek to use the space, thus fuelling the legitimacy of religion as a topic for discussion and negotiation. However, these formal groups are attended by those who already recognise, to some degree, the other faith and tend to have a liberal, pluralist or inclusivist theology. In contrast, on an 'informal' level the dialogue is between those who either only have a weak connection to a religious community, or who have chosen not to seek knowledge of the other religion through the formal channels. These people are presented with the reality of 'otherness' when they come into contact with people of a different religion, and thus are led to dialogue. It is my hypothesis that the space itself allows this informal inter-faith dialogue to be possible. In a community centre which did not have a faith component, where religious bodies did not meet, religious festivals were not overtly marked, religious symbols and artefacts were not to be found, religion would not so readily be an issue for discussion. In a space which was completely defined by a religious identity, such as a place of worship which was not used for non-worship activities, the space would rarely provide the opportunity for dialogue. In a space which was not as inviting, physically neutral and accessible, the users would not stay around long enough to enter into dialogue.

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated that there is a structure of social relationships which relates directly to the fact that the experience that is being observed is so thoroughly defined by the particular features of the social spaces offered by the Faith Together community centres. This makes it possible to ask questions pertinent to all spaces where faith groups come into contact with one another: how does the space operate in developing religious identity, how is ownership of the space expressed, what is the relationship between the objectives for and the realities of the space, how do different groups and individuals experience the space differently? Many of these questions as they pertain to Faith Together in Leeds 11 will be addressed at various points through this study.

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<sup>120</sup> There is a growing body of literature which studies the cross-over between sacred and secular space e.g. Gilliat-Ray (2004, 2005), Knott (2005b) and Knott and Franks (2007).



This first part of the thesis has provided an overview of some of the main contextual features of the study. Through a consideration of the methodological and theoretical setting, the religious, historical, social and economic framework of inter-faith dialogue, and the national and local context for Muslim-Christian co-working, a picture has been developed of a rich and varied context for the fieldwork and the related conclusions. This context will be vital in extending the arguments offered in the remainder of the thesis.



## Chapter 5: Fieldwork Methodology

Having provided an extensive, but necessary, contextual setting for this study, it is now possible to move into a consideration of the specific fieldwork findings and their relationship with this context. Chapter one provides a theoretical and methodological context for this study in its entirety. In order to specifically situate the fieldwork methodologically, this chapter provides a commentary to some of the principal approaches, issues and concerns of the fieldwork. In the introduction to this study, the research question identified was:

- When public money encourages faith communities to work together, as in Faith Together in Leeds 11, what impact is there on relationships between individuals and between faith communities?

It is this question which provided the basis for the conduct of the fieldwork.

### *5.1. Fieldwork Planning and Process*

Drawing on the research question, the aim for the fieldwork component of my study can be summarised as:

- To provide evidence for analysis of the implications of public funding for projects with a multifaith dimension, and to provide evidence for analysis of the effects of such co-working on Muslims and Christians, especially as it impacts on their relationship with the 'other' faith.

In order to pursue this aim, the objectives of the fieldwork were:

- To interview individuals involved in Faith Together in Leeds 11 about their attitudes both to the project and to their own and the 'other' faith.
- To observe the activities of Faith Together in Leeds 11 for evidence to support or challenge the statements made by individuals.
- To gather data as appropriate on other potentially comparable case studies.

### *Selection of Method*

For a number of reasons a qualitative, broadly anthropological approach was taken to the collection of the data.<sup>121</sup> A quantitative approach, such as a questionnaire or other survey method, would have limited the range or depth of responses possible, and would have been inappropriate in a setting where issues surrounding functional literacy levels

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<sup>121</sup> David Silverman's outline of reasons for and against using qualitative methods was particularly useful when making this decision (2005: 5- 14).



and suspicion of authority may have prevented many people responding. The qualitative approach to data collection also allowed for evolving responses to changing situations in the local area. The significance of this will become clear below, where the impact of the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 London bombings will be discussed. The twin ethnographic methods of participant observation and semi-structured interview were used in order to provide opportunities for in-depth discussion of themes as well as observation of the dynamics of Faith Together in Leeds 11.<sup>122</sup> Clearly, the method adopted has evolved from the purpose and the place of the study, rather than being a pre-formulated method to deal with any situation. It is the method considered most likely to provide accounts which do some justice to the complexity of reality. As McLoughlin describes ethnography, in the specific context of Islamic studies:

At its best, ethnography can give voice to less reductive, more bottom-up, accounts of how, for example, Islam and being Muslim is situated and creatively negotiated in the complex and often contradictory course of very different sorts of people's lives (2007: 274).

### *The Fieldwork Process*

Participant observation of activities associated with Faith Together in Leeds 11 took place mainly between May 2004 and December 2006, although some contact with the centres continued beyond 2006. During this time I took part in Music and Movement classes with my daughter, acted as a classroom assistant for an English language course, regularly ate lunch in the Community Café, and became part of a Christian group exploring relations with Muslim neighbours. I attended a range of community events which included:

- Islamic Relief fundraising event
- Women's Health Education Fairs
- Hamara Women's Group
- Street Markets
- Beeston Festival-Mela
- Public Meetings following the London bombings
- 'Trust or Terror' formal inter-faith gatherings

I also attended Methodist, Anglican, Ecumenical and Jesus Army services of worship. My observations were recorded by note taking after the activity, to avoid unnecessary interruption of the natural flow of events. During these varied activities I entered into

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<sup>122</sup> The approach and reflections of Tim May (2001) provided the basis for the use of the interview and participant observation.



conversations with countless people about the themes of my research. However, building upon this body of information I also undertook strategic interviews to gather more detailed data.

Thirteen residents of Beeston Hill were interviewed between June 2004 and October 2006, and one person was interviewed twice.<sup>123</sup> One group interview took place with male Muslims who live in Beeston Hill. Those interviewed included people in positions of authority within Faith Together in Leeds 11, and a sample of other associated individuals. The sample was made up of those who were suggested by others as appropriate people to interview, and those who were in a position to give a particularly useful account because, for instance, of their involvement or lack of involvement in the project; or their skills, experiences or beliefs which made their perspective unusual. Interviews mainly took place in the Building Blocks and Hamara centres, with only one taking place in the interviewee's home. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing a focus on the main themes of the study, but also providing space for new perspectives and themes to develop from the experience of individuals. Questions covered four broad areas: experiences and perceptions of the local area; level and type of motivation and involvement in Faith Together; theological responses to religious diversity, working with the secular state and working with people of other religions; and lastly, experiences of co-working and dialogue. Interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. In response to local sensitivities these transcriptions were then made available to the interviewees for them to check the accuracy of my recording.<sup>124</sup> There were very few corrections made, although there were some requests for me to omit information that related specifically to easily identifiable events. These references were omitted and I do not believe this omission had any effect on the general content and import of the interviews.

In a study such as this, which seeks to access the demotic discourse of an ethnically diverse neighbourhood, it is necessary to reflect on the extent to which language issues may have limited the data collected in these interviews. A significant minority of the people in Beeston with whom I came into contact were Punjabi speakers and did not speak English fluently, although most had reasonable basic vocabulary. The issue of

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<sup>123</sup> It was hoped that more interviews would be conducted, but the ability to access people for interviews was severely curtailed after July 2005.

<sup>124</sup> The recording of the group interview with members of the Hamara Men's Group was not checked with all members of the group but only with the group's leader.



language was most notable in the English language class I observed, a group interview with older South Asian Muslim men and one interview with a South Asian Muslim woman. As I do not have appropriate language skills there was a need to rely on informal translation by the English teacher and, in the case of the group interview, a community worker. Having established a good relationship with the English teacher I was able to ask her both to assist with an interview, with the enthusiastic agreement of the interviewee, and also ask her to assist with informal conversations in the English language class. In the group interview, although many of the men spoke sufficient English to engage in lively conversation, the community worker was able to translate both questions and answers when the vocabulary was unfamiliar. The informality of this arrangement was particularly appropriate in this context, where the presence of a formal interpreter who was unfamiliar with both my research and the local community may have caused some hesitation on the part of those being interviewed. The way in which my questions were answered, and the way in which English was used as much as possible, with translation only being required at specific points, gives me confidence in the responses I received.

As well as data gathered from the primary fieldwork site of Faith Together in Leeds 11, data was also collected more widely. Interviews were conducted with three people with a national perspective on the field of state-faith relations.<sup>125</sup> I attended as a participant-observer a range of meetings and events including conferences of the Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber, and networking and training events organised by bodies such as the Faith Based Regeneration Network (FbRN). This data was important in both contextualising Faith Together in Leeds 11 and in clarifying some of the significant themes and issues in the national field of faith-state and Muslim-Christian relations.

### *The Insider/Outsider Problem*

Part of the fieldwork process necessitated the continued negotiation of my role as a participant-observer. Knott (2005a: 246) uses a linear model to show a continuum from the researcher as complete observer to the researcher as complete participant, with the observer-as-participant and the participant-as-observer representing the midway

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<sup>125</sup> These were David Rayner of the Inner Cities Religious Council, Dorreen Finneron of the Faith Based Regeneration Network UK and Guy Wilkinson, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Secretary for Inter Faith Relations and National Inter Faith Advisor. Finneron and Wilkinson were interviewed by telephone, Rayner was interviewed in person.



positions between the two extremes. Arguably, the two extremes of complete participant and complete observer represent the practical outliving of the two extremes characterised in the distinction between what Flood describes as first-order, 'faith seeking understanding' theology (complete participant), and empirical, scientific, objective religious studies (complete observer). However, to illustrate these extremes Knott uses rather unusual cases. The complete participant she illustrates with the example of Fatima Mernissi, who: 'is certainly not an authorised Islamic leader nor a trained theologian, but, as one who writes as a Muslim with the deliberate intention of recovering the Islamic past in order to understand women's rights, she evidently counts herself as an insider' (2005a: 248). Given that the rest of the Muslim community may not see Mernissi as a 'complete participant', this example illustrates that insider perspectives can be complex and problematic. The complete observer Knott illustrates with the example of a 1950s project where researchers covertly gained access to a prophetic group. Again, this is an interesting example:

Although the researchers were scientific outsiders, to the prophet, Mrs Keech, and her followers, they appeared to be complete participants (2005a: 249).

Clearly, the complete observer role, although sought, was not achieved in this instance as the researchers were unavoidably 'in a position of influencing those people they were supposed to be observing' (Knott, 2005a: 250). The ethical issues with this type of covert research are obvious, and alone undermine the potential benefit of any results. I find that Knott's examples undermine the extremes which the theoretical discourse, at a distance to the 'field', can sometimes appear to promote.<sup>126</sup> The complete insider and the complete outsider have their failings and complexities as methodological stances, and arguably the latter is impossible to achieve. Knott's midway positions of observer-as-participant and participant-as-observer are probably more akin to the vast majority of studies carried out under the remit of religious studies,<sup>127</sup> and certainly provide exemplars which sensitise researchers to the observer and participant stances. I identify this study as at some mid-way point along Knott's continuum. Although I am not a participant-as-observer, nor am I completely the observer-as-participant, as I am an insider to many of the theological positions that are taken by respondents and

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<sup>126</sup> An example of an academic who seeks distance from the field or from 'getting our hands dirty' is Russell McCutcheon (1997: 6). Although to some extent successful it is possible to question how much more successful his arguments would be if they did relate to the practical outliving of religion, which he describes as a 'conceptual tool [which] ought not to be confused with an ontological category actually existing in reality' (1997: viii).

<sup>127</sup> Although it would necessitate an extensive cataloguing of studies in order to verify this, a project which does not form part of my research.



commentators. The relationship between participation and observation, between insider and outsider, became of especial significance when considering the ethical implications of my role as an active participant, which is discussed below.

### *Reflexivity*

The Insider/Outsider problem leads to a consideration of reflexivity; an awareness of one's own position in relationship to the research being undertaken, and awareness of the researcher's own role in creating the narrative that is recorded.

A reflexive account of our knowledge-making work can give us a more accurate sense of where we are, because it will always require us to tell how we got there. Reflexivity should also free us from the stultifying fiction that our every belief and action can and should derive from our scholarly training, or else be suspect. And most importantly, it should help it to relieve some of the awful asymmetry that currently exists in our field as we apply to our informants and their institutions culturally and psychologically based interpretations from which we exempt ourselves (Hufford, 1999: 308- 309).

Chapter one sought to clarify the academic situatedness of my research in an attempt to deal reflexively with the reality of research, and demonstrate, to paraphrase Hufford, 'how I got here'. However, it is not sufficient to situate myself within the academic discourse alone, which could in any case be seen as only an effort to lend legitimacy to my methodological approach. It is also necessary to recognise, as Hufford noted, the 'stultifying fiction that our every belief and action can and should derive from our scholarly training, or else be suspect'. It is therefore necessary to comment on the fact that I am a Unitarian, and have been funded in my research by a Unitarian scholarship fund, the Hibbert Trust.

Although the scholarship does not require specific outcomes, and the influence of the Trustees amounts to a friendly interest and a concern to support my studies in whatever way I deem appropriate, there are elements of my research which are of more than academic concern both to me and to the Hibbert trustees. Although a non-dogmatic movement, Unitarians tend to be concerned with issues of religious harmony, many espousing a Universalist theology, and are generally supportive of inter-faith and multi-faith activities. The Hibbert Trust takes a particular interest in contemporary studies. Their website states:

The Hibbert Trustees are responsible for the administration of both the Hibbert Trust and the Case Fund. The Trustees will consider applications from individuals or organisations seeking to promote:

- the spread of Christianity in its most intelligible form



- the exercise of private judgement in matters of religion
- unfettered learning on religious matters (The Hibbert Trust, 2007).

Clearly, these are very broad terms which could cover a vast number of academic studies, and are in no way intended to limit the way in which scholarship is pursued. However, it is important to reflexively acknowledge the extent to which I approach this study with a positive understanding of inter-faith dialogue, which is an important aspect of this study. Although an active member of my own faith community, I am not a member of the Christian and Muslim communities which are the main communities under study. As a Unitarian, I share some theological understandings with both religions, but am very much part of a small, self-selecting and geographically dispersed community.

My awareness of my own situatedness in relation to the fieldwork method and environment, is not sufficient to allow me to escape the postmodern critique that researchers are constructing only one of many possible realities (Bryman, 2001: 469). It is necessary to maintain awareness that there is a multiplicity of different voices to be heard, and even if the experience of Faith Together in Leeds 11 can be fitted into a narrative structure, this is only one possible narrative that this situation and other similar situations can create. The fact of my personal involvement as the researcher will necessarily influence to some extent the narrative that emerges:

Accounts of the social world, no matter how much they are animated by a sincere desire for truth, are never more than stories we tell whose themes and meanings can never fully escape the social positioning (e.g. class, gender, nationality, disciplinary culture, ideology) of the storyteller (Seidman, 1998: 117).

### *The Process of Analysis*

In order to analyse the data gathered from interviews and observations it was necessary to firstly gather the information into a useable form. As already mentioned, the interview recordings were transcribed and then checked with the interviewee. Observation notes were word processed from their original form as notes in a fieldwork journal. Clearly, it was necessary to code this information. Although coding has traditionally been a paper-based exercise, I decided that the accuracy and accessibility of my coding would be greater if I used an electronic system for analysing my data. To this end, I used the NVivo programme. The Nvivo programme does not replace the researcher as the analyst of information, but provides greater scope for viewing and



organising data. Although it is possible to search the inputted data using NVivo, the researcher codes the data through highlighting and selecting, in much the same way as would be done on paper. However, once the data has been coded it is possible to organise it around 'nodes' in a variety of ways. The possibilities for this as a paper exercise are very limited. With NVivo the ability to organise and view the data in different ways allows the researcher to explore the data in more detail. Having coded the data through Nvivo it was then possible to view and organise information to identify data related to the key issues and themes, and to note new themes and issues.

### *The Themes Selected*

The themes selected for particular data collection and analysis were partly suggested by the literature review and partly developed in response to the field. Questions in interviews were grouped around the interviewees' own religious commitment, including those with no religious commitment; the experience of, and response to, working with people of the 'other' faith; the experience of involvement in Faith Together in Leeds 11; and the experience of the local area. More detailed questions, concerning issues such as the funding streams for faith-based projects, were asked in interviews with those holding leadership positions in the project. As a result of the broad range of questions, and the unstructured approach which allowed other issues to come to the fore, several themes emerged as significant. The principal themes which emerged were:

- The nature and quality of religious/non-religious identity
- The relationship between policy agendas and faith-based organisations
- The role/non-role of theology in the lived reality of Muslim-Christian dialogue in a religiously diverse neighbourhood
- The impact of the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 London bombings on the local community

This final theme was, of course, completely unexpected and strictly speaking outside the parameters of this research. However, as will be discussed below, the significance of these events and the data generated is such that these events became an important area of study. Most interestingly, the response to the London bombings uncovered many issues about what constitutes community, and who represents or leads the community. These would necessarily have been important issues anyway, but the events following 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 provided an unexpected wealth of data with which to pursue this issue.



*Can these outcomes be generalized?*

When working with a small body of research data it is important to ask to what extent the findings of this research can be generalized (Silverman, 2005: 304). One of the attractions of using Faith Together in Leeds 11 as the primary source of research data is that it is, apparently, a unique project, certainly in the UK and possibly beyond. Although this could be grounds for justifying an analysis based purely on the intrinsic interest of the subject, I do consider there to be opportunities here to generalize about Muslim-Christian dialogue and co-working. That the project is unique does not, I believe, mean that the results cannot be generalized. All qualitative research works with unique subjects, individuals, and it is still possible to expect that there will be some similarity of experience between individuals. In the same way, it is possible to assume that there will be some similarity in other projects where at least some of the components of faith, state, and buildings are present. This method of working is inductive, moving from the small scale and particular to the larger scale and the general, and it applies to the place where the research has been carried out as well as to the people who were the subjects of the research (Casey, 1996: 45; Knott, 2000a: 93).<sup>128</sup>

*5.2. Ethical Issues*

The consideration and application of ethical standards in fieldwork requires flexibility if it is to be successful (Draper, 2000: 1). In this consideration of ethical issues I hope to demonstrate the extent to which I have sought the highest standards, not least through constant flexibility and reconsideration of the issues and my practice. The British Sociological Association 'Statement of Ethical Practice' provides much of the framework for the comments that follow (British Sociological Association, 2002). However when faced with the reality of the field, the limitations of such codes, as noted by others (Maxey, 2000: 59), became abundantly clear.

*Informed consent – an evolving method*

Maxey (2000) has identified that the issue of informed consent is considerably more complex, and unlikely to respond to general rules to cover all situations than some textbooks seem to assume. Although attempting to follow best practice with regard to informed consent for my research it became apparent that not only is *informed* consent

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<sup>128</sup> However, the study can not be described as inductive as I came to the fieldwork with questions already formed about the field I was keen to observe. The methodology of purely inductive study is usually known as 'grounded theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).



difficult to obtain, but also that there is little guidance on the type of situations I was faced with. In order to secure appropriate consent I have undertaken several exercises:

1. Email exchanges and meetings with the two principal figures or 'gatekeepers' within Faith Together in Leeds 11 during which I clarified my work, and ensured the 'gatekeepers' were giving full, informed consent to my work.
2. Attendance at a Faith Together in Leeds 11 board meeting where I made a brief presentation about my project and asked for any concerns to be aired. No concerns were aired, and this raised questions for me about what I can only term 'consent by silence'. As had been identified by Maxey (2000: 65), for those being researched the research itself is often of little importance. For many of those involved in the running of the project there appeared to be a presumption that, as the gatekeepers had agreed to the research it must be acceptable. Therefore they did not raise any objections but neither did they voice interest or approval. For others, such as the women involved in the English language class, the research was of little interest, if it was understood at all. My presentations to groups often therefore met with silence, and a 'yes' only if I asked for a definite answer as to whether or not the group was happy for me to continue.
3. Careful explanation, often repeated several times on different occasions and in different ways, to individuals and groups about the objectives of my research and what I was, and was not, recording. This raised significant issues about language, and levels of understanding. For some people using the centres there was very little understanding of what I was doing or why, despite translation and repeated attempts. This is partly explained by the lack of context; many of the women in the English class for example had little understanding of Universities, academia or research, and had never had formal education themselves. Many simply assumed I was learning how to be an English teacher, an impression that it was difficult to remove. In the situation I did the best that was possible in terms of explanation and 'informing' the consent that I received.
4. During the first six months of research I became increasingly aware of the people who had not been in, or were likely to be in, any situation where I could tell them about my research. Many of the users of the centres were 'passing through' rather than taking part in an organised activity where I could seek consent. However, these people were still being observed, and I was gathering data on the basis of their actions. I felt that even those whom I did not directly speak to had a right to at least be aware of my presence, and so to bring any



concerns to the attention of the management committees should they object to my work or to my presence. To this end I produced a poster in English and Urdu which was displayed in both centres (see Appendix 1). The posters led to some unexpected phone calls from journalists after the London bombings, but they did not result in local people contacting me or, as far as I am aware, the centre management, to express concern or interest about my research.

Clearly, the issue of gaining informed consent was not as straightforward as some text books might suggest, indeed, it is questionable to what extent truly informed consent has been achieved. However, as Draper notes:

Often these issues are resolved by a compromise between the personal values of the researcher, the social values of the society or culture being studied and the professional values of the academic institution (2000: 5).

#### *Researcher as carrier of information*

There has been a need to remain aware of my potential role as a carrier of information from site to site and individual to individual. Involvement in activities outside my research-life, as well as contact with a number of different projects and individuals, has meant that I have needed to remain conscious of the extent to which I have the ability to affect the reality I am observing in very practical ways. This has required consideration at various points, for instance when observing board meetings of Faith Together in Leeds 11. On some occasions my knowledge of other similar projects, and ways in which problems faced by the board had been resolved elsewhere, could have proved useful, but may also have directly impacted on the way the projects developed. My feeling in this instance was not to comment, but this was a difficult decision to make when reflecting on my role as an active participant.

#### *An active participant observer*

The two early settings for participant observation were a Music and Movement class for parents and toddlers, and a women's English language class.<sup>129</sup> In both settings my role was very much an active participant observer. Sitting on the sidelines was not an option. In the Music and Movement class my daughter and I took part, and I shared the usual

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<sup>129</sup> In effect, Music and Movement was a group for mothers and toddlers, as no fathers attended during the period of my observations. This reflects the prevailing culture in the UK which continues to be for the mother rather than the father to undertake primary child-rearing responsibilities. Equally, the English language class was entirely female, and was originally linked to a women's group at the Hamara centre.



round of conversation between mothers. In the English class I was actively involved in assisting the women with their language development, especially practising their English. This level of participation led to my role as a researcher becoming easily forgotten, and it was necessary to frequently remind people why I was present. A second issue concerning my active participation, especially with the English class, was the extent to which my participation actively affects the field of study. In acting to some extent as a teaching assistant it could be argued that I was increasing the likelihood of success of the class, and also providing the type of opportunity for interaction which I was hoping to *observe* rather than *create*. However, I think the advantages gained through my active participation outweigh the possible negative effects which I would argue are theoretical rather than manifest problems.

Consideration of my role as an active participant led me to consider the concept of what Herman and Mattingly term 'reciprocal research relations'.<sup>130</sup> Herman and Mattingly: 'are certain that many researchers already contribute to the communities they study in supportive ways, but see their participation as 'behind-the-scenes' work separate from the sphere of academic knowledge and discourse' (1999: 220). I did not overtly negotiate my role as researcher on the basis of my contributing to the environment I was in, but I considered that my presence unavoidably had some effect and that it was therefore ethically more appropriate to seek to provide some balance to my 'taking' of information with some 'giving' of what skills and help I could offer. Although my efforts do not go as far as those of Herman and Mattingly, who contributed a significant amount of time and resource to the communities they studied, I nevertheless believe it is appropriate to go: 'beyond mitigating or limiting negative effects, to establishing relations of reciprocity between ourselves and the individuals and communities we study' (1999: 211).

The insider/outsider problem and the issue of reflexivity, already discussed in broad terms, become of particular significance when considering my role as an active participant observer. Were I simply an observer there would be no need for self-disclosure about my own religious position. However, in the role of active participant observer my own religious situatedness was unavoidably brought into the arena. There was an assumption by Muslim interviewees that I was a Christian, and an assumption by

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<sup>130</sup> Being an active participant observer is very different from the role of 'active participant' in action research, where the traditional subject of research becomes an active participant in the research process, resulting in practical outcomes related to the participants (Stringer, 1999).



Christian interviewees that I was not a Christian. Although I did not volunteer the information unless asked, the fact that I am a Unitarian may have affected how interviewees and others *viewed* me. There is no evidence, however, that this affected how they *responded* to me.

### *Dissemination of research findings*

There are two reasons why the dissemination of research findings is an important issue in the ethics of this research. Firstly, part of the conditions for the funding made available for this research by the Hibbert Trust was that the research findings would be appropriately disseminated beyond the University; secondly, one of the principal 'gatekeepers' expressed concern that the research would not just 'gather dust in a library'. It is useful to Faith Together in Leeds 11 to be the subject of published work as it strengthens funding bids by providing evidence that the work of the project is being promoted outside the local area. It is of benefit to the Hibbert Trust for the work to be disseminated as it promotes the Trust as a funding body for this type of work. Remaining aware of the potential for such requirements to affect how research is carried out, and how results are presented, I have sought to make the contents and comments as constructive as possible, without undermining the integrity of the study. Conscious of the potential for the work to be disseminated, I have also avoided naming individual respondents, although unavoidably some will be easily identifiable to local residents.

### *5.9. The Impact of the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 London Bombings*

I am not the first, nor will I be the last, to discover that fieldwork has a life of its own. As McLoughlin comments, from his own experience: 'As I learned the hard way, the experience of fieldworking can be very unpredictable' (2000: 185). In this section I intend to comment on the effect of the London bombings on my fieldwork. The broader implications of the events, and some of the key issues about community which emerged, will be explored in chapter seven below.

On 12<sup>th</sup> July 2005 at 6.30am, security forces appeared in Beeston Hill and began searching houses. News was gradually released that three of the four London bombers were linked to the area. Three of the bombers had close links with the Hamara centre, two of them living in the tight network of streets around the building. The Hamara centre became the focus of media interest. Some of the young men had used the services of the centre; one was involved in youth work. After the bombings, a youth worker from



Hamara was arrested and held for several weeks, although never charged. Journalists besieged the building and local people were scared to visit the General Practitioner's medical surgery which was based there at the time. Building Blocks provided facilities for the police, and although it received media attention was not placed under the same scrutiny as Hamara. It was not often evident in national and international coverage that the two centres are closely linked through the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project.

On 12<sup>th</sup> July 2005 I was halfway through my fieldwork for this study. It was instantly clear to me that these events would have a profound effect on my research. Most immediately this involved the interest of the press. The posters referred to above, which were produced as part of my endeavour to secure informed consent, contained my mobile telephone number and email address. This led to telephone calls, although not emails, from journalists which I did not respond to.<sup>131</sup> Protecting my relationships with key informants and the local community proved to be difficult and I faced much greater suspicion of my research than was the case before the bombings. However, the fact that I had been around the centres for several years, and continued to be practically involved in local activities helped in some ways to solidify my standing in the community. Indeed, I was the only academic researcher allowed access to one of the many community meetings following the bombings. When checking with one of the key respondents about whether it would be acceptable for me to attend events such as community acts of commemoration he responded that it was as important that I came as 'me the researcher' as it was that I came as 'me the person'. He was sure that my attendance would be acceptable, and virtually expected. This was an endorsement of the approach I had taken in seeking informed consent and being an active participant observer. However, the main fieldwork implication was that groups where I had still to develop links, such as youth and the local mosques, were now closed to me.

Despite being well known among certain sections of the community, I found it impossible to gain access to the youth groups linked to the Hamara centre.<sup>132</sup> Although I could have taken the route chosen by many in the media and spoken to the youth on the street I felt this was an unsafe approach, and unlikely to get balanced and considered responses. Emails to youth workers outlining my links and credentials received no reply, and I was unsuccessful in making telephone contact. Simply turning up to a youth

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<sup>131</sup> Indeed, I turned my mobile telephone off for several weeks.

<sup>132</sup> There is only provision for young children, not older teenagers, at Building Blocks.



group meeting, given the situation in the area, seemed like a potentially confrontational approach. I thus decided not to further pursue responses from young people. This is a significant limitation of the present study, and represents an area where further research could fruitfully be orientated. However, as will be explored in chapter seven, the way in which communities protect themselves, and the reasons why my work was treated with such suspicion, are in themselves useful fieldwork results.

A further limitation to my research that is not entirely linked to the aftermath of the bombings is the lack of information about the local mosques. There are three mosques very close to the Hamara and Building Blocks centres, which received a considerable amount of media interest after the bombings. Contact by telephone and letter prior to the bombings proved unsuccessful. Visiting the mosques in person after the bombings seemed inappropriate and potentially difficult to manage given the likely assumption that I was a journalist. At the latest possible stage in completing my thesis, during 2008, I have again tried to make contact with the mosques, but have found very similar problems in finding somebody who is able and willing to speak to me after the media attention following the bombings. However, I do not consider this a major limitation to my study. As will be discussed in chapter six, Muslim identity is not only articulated through the mosque. Also, I have spoken to many more Muslim women than other comparable studies (Geaves, 1994; McLoughlin, 2000), and they would not usually be reached via the mosque.<sup>133</sup>

Having provided a methodological commentary to the fieldwork component of this study, it is now appropriate to move into a detailed consideration of the themes explored through, and emerging from, this fieldwork. The following four chapters concerning religious identity, crisis and community, Beeston and the policy environment, and the lived reality of dialogue set out some of the key fieldwork findings but also relate to the preceding contextual considerations about Muslim-Christian dialogue, religion in the public square and the spatial and other features of the local context. Underpinning these fieldwork outcomes, and their relationship to these contextual themes, is the broader

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<sup>133</sup> Although I cannot evidence this within the constraints of the present study, I would argue that the majority of studies of Muslims in the UK are conducted by men and focus on the hierarchical structures within communities (e.g. Lewis, 2002). Studies undertaken by women are more likely to focus on families and women (e.g. Saifullah Khan, 1977). This is dictated by the routes of access into the community. Although some researchers, such as Pnina Werbner (e.g. 2002), manage to access both sides, in general male researchers find it easier to access the mosque while female researchers find it easier to access the family.



methodological and theoretical context, discussed in chapter one, which underpins the entirety of the approach and perspective of this study.



## Chapter 6: Religion and Identity

The nature and articulation of religious identity is fundamental to how Muslim-Christian dialogue is experienced and approached. In chapter two some of the complicating features of religious identity in England have been briefly identified. In this chapter, some of the experiences of people in Beeston Hill are narrated in order to demonstrate the features which affect demotic discourses of identity. The dominant religious and state discourse seeks to assert some uniformity to Muslim and Christian identity through systems of representation as was discussed in chapters two and three. However, notions of what it means to be a Muslim or a Christian are as various as the people who adopt the title. While in some situations the dominant discourse recognises theological and denominational variety, the demotic discourse of identity draws on ethnicity, class, education and many other indicators in presenting a patchwork of multiple and related identities. Enumerating the various ways in which people can 'be' Christian, or 'be' Muslim is clearly beyond the scope of this study, yet it is possible to indicate here some of the factors which complicate understandings of religious identity in Beeston Hill. In this section evidence from interviews and observations will be used to illustrate some of the diversity of expressions of identity found in an area such as Beeston Hill, and how religion is implicated and used in this context. I argue that there is a relationship between how religious identity is articulated and how Muslims and Christians relate to one another. The extent to which this commentary is lacking in the literature of Muslim-Christian dialogue will be evident.

The academic debates and theories in the social sciences surrounding the nature and articulation of identity are many and varied. In their critique of the dominance of 'identity' as a category, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) note that many of these debates and theories are dominated by theorists working outside their specialism who nonetheless feel 'obliged to address the question of identity' (2000: 4). They argue that 'identity' is required to do a great deal of analytical work but that it is:

...ill suited to perform this work, for it is riddled with ambiguity, riven with contradictory meanings, and encumbered by reifying connotations. Qualifying the noun with strings of adjectives – specifying that identity is multiple, fluid, constantly re-negotiated, and so on – does not solve the Orwellian problem of entrapment in a word. It yields little more than a suggestive oxymoron – a multiple singularity, a fluid crystallization – but still begs the question of why one should use the same term to designate all this and more (2000: 34).



Although they offer 'alternative analytical idioms' it could be argued that these potentially create new problems of reification. Although clearly there is a considerable body of work related to the nature of identity, it is beyond the scope of this study to review and come to conclusions about this academic debate. Instead, 'identity' is used here in a common sense way to group a series of responses and reflections about how individuals represent and understand themselves, which arose during fieldwork. The intention here is not to solve the problem of what identity is, or how identities relate to one another, or to respond to prejudices and disadvantages which relate to specific identities. Rather, the intention is to itemise some of the different factors which operated in how people described themselves, and observe how these descriptions relate to relations between Muslims, Christians and others in a religiously diverse neighbourhood.

### *3.1. Religion and Ethnicity*<sup>134</sup>

The relationship between religion and ethnicity became a frequent issue in both interview responses and observations. For some people the relationship between the two was unconsidered, whereas for others it was an important part of their religious awareness and their relationship with people of other religions. This observation is not novel. McLoughlin, reflecting on his fieldwork, identified a need to be:

...wary of associating myself exclusively with a 'loud and proud' minority of religious activists. I did not want to be alienated from the 'silent majority' whose religious identity was routinely 'ethnic' and relatively unconscious. Both groups were of equal interest to me as both represent important trends in British-Muslims identity formation (McLoughlin, 2000: 188).

It was notable in many of my fieldwork situations that individual and communal religious identity was 'routinely 'ethnic' and relatively unconscious'. This was particularly notable in the way identity was expressed as white, English or Asian even when religion was being discussed.<sup>135</sup> In informal exchanges with South Asian Muslims in various situations there was an assumption about the interchangeable relationship between being white/English and being Christian, and between being Asian and being Muslim. Indeed, when I tried to disentangle this during conversation with a group of

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<sup>134</sup> Ethnicity is a contested category in the social sciences (Baumann, 1999). However, it is a useful category here because of the way in which it was used by respondents. Setting aside the contestation over the term, I shall use it as a tool for explaining how the reified category of 'religion' is linked in the popular imagination to an equally reified category of 'ethnicity'.

<sup>135</sup> Although I use 'South Asian' to signify Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Indian, and 'Pakistani-heritage' to signify a specific background, for local people in Beeston Hill the population was divided into 'Asian' 'white' and 'asylum seeker'.



mainly Muslim South Asian women I found it virtually impossible. This was partly an issue of translation as many of the women spoke very little English. However, even with painstaking translation and explanation it was difficult for the women to identify the difference between *Christian* and *white*. The presence of a Sikh woman challenged this equation but she appeared to be seen as an isolated oddity. This demonstrated the deeply ingrained association between ethnicity and religion among these women. This was not shared by the white women who attended an ethnically and religiously mixed mother's and children's group. Here, the association was much more strongly that *Asian* was equivalent to *Muslim*, but that *white* was equivalent to *non-religious*.<sup>116</sup> The assumed significance of religion to identity is therefore unbalanced. *Asian* and *Muslim* were seen as synonymous by everyone, but *white* and *Christian* were seen as synonymous only by South Asian Muslims.

One of the interviewees gave a particularly interesting account of the relationship between ethnicity and religion because of her unusual experience. Born into a white, practising Christian family she had during her time at University 'reverted' to Islam, and subsequently married a British-born Pakistani Muslim.<sup>117</sup> As a young professional she was keen to support the local community, and was active in a number of ventures aimed at bringing Muslims and Christians together. During the interview she commented:

...the majority of Pakistanis, probably 99% are born into Muslim families but for generations they might not have been practising so its like generations of Christian families just might not practise it at all and on their form they still tick Christian, or whatever, but they don't practice. But they're not labelled Christians so much as the Pakistanis are labelled Muslim.

... It's like a label they don't want to let go of. Because that's them whereas I think white non practising Christian families are letting go of that label Christian easily, so that it's very different when you're talking about the Muslim community and then the Islamic Muslim community (Interviewee A, August 2004).

These comments reflect the different uses of religious labels within the different communities, in a way that only someone who has personally experienced both communities could notice. She recognises that there are nominal Muslims in the same way that there are nominal Christians, but that Muslims seem to find it much harder to

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<sup>116</sup> Hence, a white, English, non-religious mother was observed asking a South Asian Muslim woman about Diwali. She associated Diwali with 'Asianness' and therefore assumed Diwali was a Muslim festival.

<sup>117</sup> Converts to Islam often prefer to be described as 'reverts'. This indicates a belief that all humans are born in a state of knowing and worshipping God. Becoming a Muslim involves reverting to that original state.



relinquish this religious identity. She clearly adopts a modern, western, identity discourse which separates religion from culture, in a way that would probably not be recognised by many of her South Asian co-religionists. Other interviews demonstrated the varying ways in which the subtleties of identity were recognised, and gave some indicators as to the possible reasons for this variety.

For example, during an interview with a group of Muslim men discussions turned towards how they had been received by the autochthonous population when they had arrived in England during the 1950s and 1960s. Some of the men described amazing, almost epic, journeys by car from Pakistan to England. Incidentally to the main thrust of the conversation, 'English' and 'Christian' were used interchangeably by many of the men. The conversation was summed up, and the confusion between English and Christian noted, by the group's facilitator, a middle-aged South Asian Muslim man who is not locally resident in Beeston Hill:

...when they first came the Christians, because that's what they believe the English to be, a Christian country. They were more accommodating much more friendly, much more Christian basically then what there seems to be today. They may have Christian names nowadays but the ethics of Christianity the fundamentalism of Christianity doesn't seem to be there (Interviewee L, Hamara Men's Group June 2006).

The passage of time is significant in this comment. These men arrived in England just at the start of the real decline in church attendance. They left Pakistan within living memory of partition when religion was the main issue in the bloody and traumatic creation of the new Pakistan (Jalal, 1994; Y. Khan, 2007).<sup>138</sup> It seems plausible that they arrived in the UK with a particularly heightened sense of religious boundaries. They have then witnessed the growth of secularity, but because of the identification of religion with ethnicity they have perceived this as a change in the nature of Christianity rather than a decline in the importance of religion. Despite the recognition that there have been changes in other religions, there is no recognition that many of 'the English' would not describe themselves as Christian, or would have only a very tenuous hold on this identity. As Interviewee A noted, 'Muslims' in England seem to find it harder to let go of the religious label than 'Christians' in England. This is likely to be in part due to

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<sup>138</sup> A conversation between elderly Sikh and Muslim women alerted me to the continuing saliency of the experience of partition. The women talked with enthusiasm about a pre-partition time in India when they remembered Muslim, Sikh and Hindu children all playing together, they then fell silent for some moments before continuing the conversation along more mundane lines (Observation Notes, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2004).



the experience of living in diaspora, a concept only recently applied in religious studies to religions other than Judaism (McLoughlin, 2005a).

As Pnina Werbner noted:

Pakistanis belong in a taken-for-granted way not to a single diaspora but to several *different* diasporas – Asian, Muslim, nationalist Pakistani, Punjabi – a hybrid diaspora, each with its own aesthetics and ethics, which is imagined and performed rhetorically through cultural events (2002: 17).

Although many of the Muslims living in Beeston Hill are second, third and fourth generation there is nevertheless a strong link to the 'homeland' of Pakistan. This was observable in a culture of regular visiting of Pakistan, close links with family in Pakistan, and a preference for television from Pakistan. Although this link was, unsurprisingly, stronger among the first generation there was nevertheless a culture of links with Pakistan which included all generations. This link has indeed strengthened over time. When asked 'Do you think people are more aware of political issues than you were when you first arrived' the men's group responded:

C. Yes

E. When we first came here we didn't have a television, and even if we did have a television we couldn't understand it!

C. You can watch the whole world.

E. Didn't have time to watch television when we first came here (Hamara Men's Group June 2006).

The links provided by television and other communication technologies feed into the sense of being different among those living in diaspora, and thus plausibly increase the desire to maintain a religious identity which clearly continues to link people to the homeland with which they may have a decreasing amount in common. Clearly, this relates to the experience of partition, particularly among the older generation, which provides a link between religion and nation which otherwise makes little sense when thinking in terms of religious diaspora – obviously the homeland for Muslims living in diaspora would not be Pakistan. For Pakistani Muslims in Beeston Hill the 'hybrid diaspora' exemplifies the identification of religion with ethnicity.

The extent to which religion and ethnicity are commonly identified with one another even among later generations was well illustrated by a story during an interview with a young, well-educated, Pakistani-heritage Muslim woman who had attended a special



school during part of her youth. She described her confusion when first encountering a child who was black, as opposed to Asian:

I remember one Afro-Caribbean girl being there, I was Asian and then there were a few white children and in my head I was Muslim because I was Asian and the white kids were Christian because they were white and Christian, but I couldn't figure out what the black girl was (Interviewee M, June 2006).

Here it is clear that the identification of religion with ethnicity was learned at a young age, and within a specific local context where identity is played out. Having not grown up among a black community, there had been no previous need to identify what being black means in a context where religion is assumed to be of significance in identity. The presence of refugees and asylum seekers in Beeston Hill saw this experience written large on the experience of the community as a whole. Black Christians and Muslims, white Muslims and Asian Christians all confused the convenient ascription of religion to ethnicity. This provoked both some interesting reflections and also some challenging situations, as will be discussed below.

As will be explored in chapter eight, the relationship between ethnicity and religion has even been seen to have an impact on how government relates to local communities. Particularly, it has been argued that government interest in religion is often confused with, or used as part of, government interest in black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.<sup>139</sup> However, one of the Christian community leaders added a more subtle understanding of the perceived relationship between ethnicity and religion:

...because of the secularisation of the white community so people more or less assume that white people haven't got a faith. So I don't think its about actually identifying faith as black and minority ethnic, its just the assumption that the faith based part of the white community is so small (Interviewee N, November 2004).

Here, it is clear that within leadership and governmental structures, the assumption was much more that 'white' implied 'of no religion'. This is despite the fact that the 2001 census showed a significant number of the white population still chose, for official purposes, to adopt the label 'Christian'.<sup>140</sup> It is possible that underlying this is an issue about official versus unofficial contexts. The white population routinely reject the label Christian in unofficial contexts, despite adopting it in official contexts such as hospital

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<sup>139</sup> This is the phrase often used in public discourse to refer to any group which identifies itself as other than white and English.

<sup>140</sup> A pattern which supports Davie's (1994) thesis of 'believing without belonging', and also the conclusion of Voas and Bruce (2004) that choosing the label 'Christian' is merely a rejection of other possible labels.



admissions and census returns. It is interesting therefore that this unofficial rejection of Christianity is taken to be the norm, even by official structures such as government agencies. This would be an interesting area for further exploration, though beyond the remit of this study.

When ethnicity and religion are routinely related it becomes difficult to disentangle the nature and scope of dialogue. It is only possible to be in dialogue, however informally, with a person of another religion if there is some shared understanding of which religion a person identifies with. Although many of the South Asian population of Beeston Hill would consider themselves Muslim, many white residents would have a more attenuated grasp of a religious identity. For many, an identity is adopted in a formal situation, e.g. a census return, which would be avoided in an informal situation. Even this brief overview of how ethnicity and religion are related demonstrates the significance of considering the nature of identity when considering the nature and effect of dialogue. Equally, the relationship between religion and ethnicity as identities that are more or less related to degrees of poverty, and levels of community cohesion, is significant in how government relates to minority communities. The experience and impact of the asylum seeker population in Beeston Hill provided further evidence of the way in which religion and ethnicity could be mutually significant.

During the period of my research there was a rapid growth and then equally rapid fall in the number of asylum seekers living in Beeston Hill, having been placed there by government agencies.<sup>141</sup> There were many practical ramifications of this change in population, not least concerning access to welfare and other provision.<sup>142</sup> However, it was also revealing to observe the impact the asylum seekers had on communal and personal religious identity.<sup>143</sup> The asylum seekers were a direct challenge to the simple

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<sup>141</sup> They were principally asylum seekers rather than those who had received refugee status because of the nature of the housing provision in the area. When refugee status was achieved individuals were usually moved out of the area. This was felt by many to be a short-sighted and damaging policy. As one local Christian leader noted of the asylum seekers his church and the local community assisted: 'Pretty much as soon as they become refugees they're moved on so we sort out all their problems ... but just when they get to the point when they could give something back and sometimes want to give something back, they're told no, well that's it off you go' (Interviewee N, June 2006).

<sup>142</sup> Towards the end of my fieldwork there was a growth in the number of economic migrants from Eastern Europe and Turkey. Many of the religious issues were of a similar nature and so I have not sought to give a separate account of this population change.

<sup>143</sup> The diversity of the asylum seeker population added a further concern regarding fieldwork ethics. Although, as described in chapter five, I had used a variety of strategies to gain informed



equations of white = Christian, Asian = Muslim. Among the asylum seekers who lived, although for a brief time, in Beeston Hill there were:

- African Christians
- African Muslims
- Middle Eastern Christians
- Middle Eastern Muslims
- European Muslims

In English language classes women from these backgrounds came together with local South Asian women. During the course of my fieldwork this changed the nature of the class from a primarily elderly, Panjabi speaking class, to a much more mixed group with only one or two of the older women still attending regularly. This made light hearted conversations that had happened previously, about 'arranged' versus 'love' marriage, for instance, much more difficult. However, this may be related to age as well as language and cultural barriers. The South Asian women, at least initially, were much less forthcoming around the asylum seeker learners. Conversations became increasingly easy over time and were on occasion concerned with religion, partly because the class tutor used religion, particularly about festivals and customs, as a way to encourage conversation in English. The conversations were then quite unusual as a Polish woman describing Christmas customs was describing something different to that which the South Asian women had come across before in England. African women portrayed a very different church life to that which is usually experienced in the UK. Equally, Muslims from Turkey and Africa had different ways of celebrating Muslim festivals and different dress codes which made it sometimes difficult for them to be encompassed within the dominant understanding of Islam operating in the group.

One of the interesting observations regarding the asylum seekers during an interview came from a local white, Christian leader who noted that:

Hamara now does a lot of work with refugees and asylum seekers too, one of the ironies is that Christians fleeing persecution in Muslim countries seeking asylum here are going to Hamara for refugee and asylum seeker support (Interviewee N, November 2004).

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consent from those who spoke English and Panjabi, it was simply impossible to ensure informed consent from those asylum seekers with whom I came into contact. Many had limited English, and although there was usually someone to translate into and out of Panjabi, there was rarely someone who could do the same with any of the many languages spoken by the asylum seekers. I did not therefore conduct interviews with any asylum seekers, and I chose to place the emphasis in observation on the longer term residents of Beeston Hill and their response to the asylum seekers.



Certainly the staff at the Hamara centre expressed deep concern about asylum seekers and described endeavours to support them. Although the issue of religion was not mentioned in this context, there was some recognition that asylum seekers were being identified with Hamara because of Hamara's role in supporting the local South Asian population. For instance, a senior member of staff at the Hamara centre commented: 'I think because some of the asylum seeker population has some of the same backgrounds they are often directed through other people that they meet to come here and ask for help' (Interviewee R, February 2006). Of course, few if any of the asylum seekers were from the Indian subcontinent so 'the same backgrounds' referred to are simply the experience of being of a minority ethnicity. In this context the ethnic identity is seen as more significant than the religious identity which for some was the primary reason for seeking asylum in the UK.

The role of the Hamara and Building Blocks community centres in facilitating community involvement was evident in comments both about asylum seekers who had become involved in the Trinity Methodist Church which meets in Building Blocks, and about their involvement in activities at Hamara. One of the community workers at Hamara commented that asylum seekers: 'would be afraid to approach people on the streets but here, this provided them an opportunity to actually converse with people, to make contact' (Interviewee L, June 2006). A local Christian leader, when considering the relationship between the church and Building Blocks, noted that: 'some people have joined the church through coming to the community centre. Because, of course, having refugees and asylum seekers meant that we had quite an influx of Christian asylum seekers' (Interviewee N, June 2006). As he noted, this was not, however, peculiar to Building Blocks: 'Most of the Methodist churches in south Leeds, have now got several active black members who've really made a difference. They've come to the rescue of aging congregations' (Interviewee N, June 2006). As well as swelling congregational numbers, it was clear from observations of Methodist and Anglican worship that African Christians were having some impact on the style and form of worship. As well as a more ebullient, praise-orientated response to worship, the autochthonous congregations were being challenged about Christian witness to people with very different life experiences, and limited language and other skills which usually aid involvement in a local community.



For Christians and Muslims in Beeston Hill the asylum seekers challenged the equation of religion with ethnicity which had been common currency. However, African and European Muslims and African and Arab Christians challenged local Muslims and Christians because of their life experiences and different ways of expressing religion, as well as their different ethnicities. Issues of social and economic need are particularly important in the life experience of asylum seekers, as indeed it was clear in Beeston Hill that social and economic forces played a role in how people related to the area and to each other. In the same way that ethnicity can be significant to religious identity, socio-economic status also impacts on how religious identity is understood and expressed.

### *6.2. Religion and Socio-Economic Status*

As was identified in chapter four, Beeston Hill is an area of economic deprivation. The Faith Together in Leeds 11 project was established in response to local community needs, and the Hamara and Building Blocks centres seek to actively address the needs of the local community. As one local community activist noted:

The fact that there's a focal point and a meeting place that's pleasant and comfortable is very important because we feel more looked after and worth while than if you're meeting in some draughty dump where you just feel like scum and like you're being treated like scum, you live in a dirty area and this is what you're thought to deserve. And if you have a nice clean well painted place with decent facilities it is going to raise your esteem (Interviewee G, March 2005).

Beeston Hill is separated from the rest of Beeston by a large public park which acts as a physical and symbolic divide between two communities. On the Beeston Hill side, where the community centres are based, the population is majority South Asian and also less economically active. Several interviewees, when describing the local area mentioned the divide that the park produced. One respondent, who had lived on both sides of the park, simply commented: 'now that's a big divide in Beeston' (Interviewee J, March 2006). One of the interviewees noted that although one side of the park was more affluent, there was a lack of community-spirit and focus that was notable in the less affluent side:

There's a definite divide with the park, there's a definite one side and another. ... I think there's a lot more deprivation the other side of the park, in the buildings that side than this side. Just slightly less money and things like that. ... It's very nice living here on this side, it's very quiet, and things like that. But there's no community, you know, there's lots of nice roads, and you know it's very quiet, but there's no like, you know, that's our community down there, down that side of the park, so you know, you go down there and you see people are walking around on the streets and you know, you're familiar you get to see people that you know and you start to recognise them. And the Building Blocks and Hamara around there



and because there's a few shops across the road on both sides, it ends up like a little community, it's where people gather and where things go on and whether you're going to look for information or to meet people or whatever it is, it tends to be there. So that's our community, but this is where we live on this side (Interviewee A, August 2004).

One of the most visible elements in the deprivation of Beeston Hill is the quality of the housing. One local resident of several decades had witnessed the decline in the area and described the issue regarding the property:

A lot of big Victorian houses ... and neither the Asians or the landlords particularly keep up the properties. So a lot of the housing has gone down into sort of disrepair, which, that's sort of brought the area down, to look at. Like I said when we were coming up, because they were rented properties they didn't do the gardens, they didn't cut the hedges; they're absentee landlords. Mostly the people who were in the houses, they're on what you'd call DHSS so the landlords are getting the DHSS cheque every week, from the government, they're not bothered about the state of the housing (Interviewee B, July 2004).<sup>144</sup>

This demonstrates that there was some awareness of a link between ethnicity and economic deprivation. However, the perception that *Asian* families are less able to maintain their properties effectively links ethnicity rather than social class to the difficulty. One young Muslim woman also commented on socio-economic issues as they related both to the park and to the South Asian population:

There are a few Asian people over that side of the park but maybe not as heavily concentrated as this side of the park. ... [a friend] and I went somewhere a few days ago and we were talking and she said you know this side of the park is more working class, maybe one or two middle class people living in the area, whereas the side of Beeston that I live in, which is only a stone's throw away, it was interesting to see the wording she used, she said its either, and it was the Asian community she was talking about, and she said it was people who were either by choice or by circumstance are not employed. And that's a very, very real description of the community (Interviewee M, June 2006).

As the previous comment about 'DHSS' tenants has already shown, the residents who 'by choice or by circumstance are not employed' are not exclusively South Asian, but as the population of Beeston Hill is principally South Asian there is a sense that there is a degree of economic inactivity which influences the area. However, as Interviewee A commented, there is a stronger sense of community identity and community spirit among those on the Beeston Hill side of the park, rather than those in the more affluent middle class area of Beeston.

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<sup>144</sup> DHSS stands for 'Department of Health and Social Security' and refers to those people who are dependent on the welfare state.



The level of economic and social need among the local community led directly to the formation of Faith Together in Leeds 11, and was especially important at the Hamara centre, as will be seen below. However, the activities provided were not exclusively used by those living in the streets adjacent to the community centres, where need appeared to be strongest. For example, among mothers and children at a group in Building Blocks, the majority of South Asian mothers were from the Beeston Hill side of the park, and the white mothers were principally, but not exclusively, from the more affluent side of the park. Equally, some of the events for which the centres were made available, such as a Women's Bazaar held at Hamara in aid of Islamic Relief, attracted a very different clientele to those usually using the services at Hamara. In general, the women were not locally resident, more middle class, more educated and more observant. There were several white reverts to Islam. Islamic education information was also available. The women's bazaar felt very different to the usual day-to-day activities of Hamara, and a very different type of Islam was being expressed. At the bazaar there was a strong sense of Islam as 'the religion' rather than 'the cultural identity'. The bazaar not only highlighted the usual nature of the clientele of Hamara but also demonstrated the way in which the space was defined by those who were using it at any time.

It was also notable that many of the staff of Hamara and Building Blocks travelled in to work rather than being locally resident, most living in slightly more affluent parts of Leeds. Despite efforts to employ local residents, this was not always possible because there were not people living locally with the necessary skills for the posts on offer. Educated, middle class Muslims and Christians in leadership roles in the two centres provide a service to Muslims and Christians who are less well off. In this sense there is a divide between people on socio-economic grounds which cross-cuts religious difference. Arguably, project workers at the two centres, and certainly the project leaders, had more in common with one another, despite their religion, than they had in common with many local residents of the same religion. This was not exclusively the case, but it does demonstrate that inter-faith dialogue in whatever form is not a straightforward relationship between a person of one faith and a person of another faith. Instead, the relationship is complicated and/or supported by other factors such as socio-economic status and education which are entirely distinct from the religious sphere. Clearly, social and economic factors play a significant part in how people relate to one another in a local area. The equation of Asian with Muslim leads to an equation between



Muslim and 'poor'. This is challenged by the presence of middle class, not locally resident, Muslims but it is not necessarily an equation which community leaders wish to reject. After all, it opens doors to funding, as will be shown below in chapter eight.

When people relate to others of similar socio-economic background at a professional level, as in other situations, they do so across religious boundaries. This contact across religious boundaries was found to be of particular importance in how religious identities, especially for people who were positive about people of other faiths, developed.

### *6.3. Contact with People of Other Religion*

Personal contact has a significant effect on how individual's religious identity develops and is expressed. This was particularly notable in the way respondents who were committed to working with other faiths expressed their motivation. For most, contact with people of other faiths was the most important basis for their attitudes to other religions, rather than pre-existing theological beliefs. For some, this originated in their youth. For example, a younger, educated Muslim woman commented:

I think its from my upbringing to be honest. From an early age I always had English friends, my bridesmaid at my wedding was an English girl, I've always had English people around me my youngest child one of his nanas is an English lady who took him on. ... I think it's from being very young; it's something my parents taught about just you know, you just get on with everybody (Interviewee K, August 2004).<sup>145</sup>

However, she also noted that in Beeston Hill this was to some extent the exception rather than the rule among Muslims: 'I think people are accepting other religions a little bit more, but the majority of people are still set in their old ways and aren't open to questions or interaction'.

This was also noted by interviewee M, who commented that her own interest in other religions 'comes from having a mixed race family, because I've got lots of races in my family which is fantastic and for me its good'. However, she also commented that this was the exception and may be linked to generation. She noted that: 'there are elders in my kind of family that struggle with it', as well as commenting that more widely: 'I

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<sup>145</sup> Although the word 'English' is used, the intention was 'Christian'. 'Nana' is a familiar form of Nanny, used to refer to a grandparent. It is used here in a form familiar to people raised in southern England, where it can refer to any older woman who plays a role in a child's life.



think there are pockets of people that have the same opinion, and then I think there are pockets of people that are, 'that's them and this is us', which is really, really, really sad'.

For one of the Christian interviewees, contact with people of other religions had also been important in cementing her pre-existing religious identity as someone who was respectful and open to people of other religions:

...but now it's our friends are Muslims, a whole new perspective; you tend to know far more about their practices, everyday life, which is very interesting. I think its very important for Christians to get to know each other and understand what people's faith means to them, because I think out of that comes respect and I think unless you know how it works out in everyday life it's very hard to get to that level of understanding. We have to work together to find common ground. ... You love everybody and you love yourself then you accept their religion and you have respect. ... I think my respect for other religions has deepened as I've got to know people on an everyday level and got to know them as friends but I always started out with that belief that you should respect everybody's religions (Interviewee W, February 2005).

As noted in chapter two, recognition of the importance of interpersonal contact is also found in the literature of inter-faith dialogue (Caspar, 1991; Goddard, 1996: 173), and provides the basis for one of the main conclusions for this thesis: interpersonal contact is more important than theological teachings in how people of different religions relate to one another.

#### *6.4. Degrees of Religious Observance*

As well as the impact of contact with people of other religions, it was also evident in observations and interviews that residents of Beeston Hill did not share similar levels of religious observance, or even share the theologian's emphasis on intra-religious variety. This is not an unusual observation, McLoughlin, of fieldwork in Bradford noted that:

...many 'ordinary' Muslims, old and young alike, did not really identify with sectarian labels. Most did not have a conscious sense of being 'Barelwis' or indeed anything else – they were just 'Muslims' or 'Sunnis' or, when pressed, 'not Wahhabis' (McLoughlin, 2000: 191).

During interviews, observations and conversations over several years I came across only one Muslim who would identify themselves with a specific branch of Islam; a Muslim community worker who openly identified himself with the Sufi tradition. Although there may have been other influences at work in the responses I received, the fact that this was supported by observations and has also been noted by others makes it possible



to conclude that theological differences between different schools of Islam have limited influence in the wider community.<sup>146</sup> For one respondent the role of culture in the identity of the local mosques was an important issue:

[My husband will] just go to one of the local mosques, and these mosques here they don't have anything for the women ... There's a big, big difference in mosques and there's a big, big difference in Muslims you have very cultural ones and these tend to be cultural mosques and ... if it is a Pakistani mosque or a Yemeni mosque or, they tend to be not as open in their way of thinking and they tend not to have women there and stuff like that (Interviewee A, August 2004).

It is unfortunate that I did not have the opportunity to interview representatives from the local mosques about the role of national culture and the different schools of Islam in the Beeston Hill mosques, but this is clearly a potential area for further fruitful research.<sup>147</sup>

For interviewee A, her sense of Islamic as opposed to Muslim identity was influenced by the degrees of religious observance she witnessed during the time when she became a Muslim. Her concern with the difference between cultural and practising Muslims was expressed during her interview:

I used to have lots and lots of debates with my Muslim friends about all sorts of things, headscarves and all the usual kind of misconceptions really, but they didn't really have the answers for me because they weren't really practising. They were just kind of Muslims by culture really, and they didn't really understand themselves ... And the other thing was my parents faith is so, so strong and I'd been brought up with that. And quite a lot of the Muslims I knew it was all about actions. It was all about a ritual prayer and fasting and doing this and doing that but it didn't seem to come from the heart as much, not as much as I'd been used to with my parents. So it took me a while before I met Muslims that had the same faith, the same level of faith, and the same belief and you know, that same depth that my parents had. And once I found that you know, I was able, I was completely convinced that I needed that, because I knew what my parents' had and although that was what I wanted I couldn't find that in Christianity and I could understand all the Islamic faith made complete sense to me but I needed that connection with God and once I found that then that was it, you know, and I found a faith as strong as my parents (Interviewee A, August 2004).

Whereas for Muslims such as interviewee A there was a clear concern with levels of religious observance, for Christians this was much less pronounced, despite a shared level of concern about those whose religious affiliation was only nominal. Christians in

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<sup>146</sup> Other factors which may have prevented interviewees identifying with a specific branch of Islam might include an assumption that the interviewer would not understand the different branches, insecurity about the correct English terms, and a desire to defend a uniform expression of Islam. However, at least the first two concerns would I hope have been addressed by my use of appropriate terms, and attempts to clarify the terms with interviewees.

<sup>147</sup> As discussed in chapters five and seven, access to members of local Mosques and their committees was severely curtailed following the July 7<sup>th</sup> bombings.



Beeston Hill had a stronger sense of their affiliation to a particular denomination of Christianity, demonstrating that denominationalism in English Christianity continues to be very important. This must also be related to the small worshipping communities in Beeston who meet in churches that are defined by denomination rather than other factors, such as *biradari* and culture, which influence attendance at mosques. Some Christians particularly from the Methodist and Anglican churches, which were partners in Faith Together in Leeds 11, expressed a strong emphasis on ecumenism. However, this did not include all members of the two churches and there was certainly some awareness that many church members preferred to retain their separate denominational identity. A local Anglican leader commented that:

...both those churches have been neighbours for a hundred years they've never really got to know each other and they're very different churches, liturgically, the parish church is very Anglo-Catholic by tradition and ethos and I imagine that doesn't sit very easily with Methodist liturgy. ... It's just something that we have to live with and try to accommodate ... so it's not an easy relationship. It would be a lot easier if these churches were more sort of middle of the road and less polarised liturgically. So at the joint worship, especially sacramental worship is not something we find easy (Interviewee S, June 2004).

A local Methodist leader, who was interviewed some time later, expressed more concern with the lack of progress that had been made towards greater ecumenism locally. The theological motivation for involvement in the local community and for working with Muslims did not necessarily carry over into a commitment to ecumenism:

One of my disappointments has been the two congregations have not come closer together. I was really hoping that we'd make more progress on that front and in fact I fear indigenous Christians in South Leeds, and the influx of people from around the world may change this for the better, but indigenous Christians from South Leeds would rather the whole thing fell to pieces and that there weren't any Christians left than that they settled their differences and worked together (Interviewee N, June 2006).

This demonstrates some of the confusing nature of religious identity found even in a small local study. Despite being very involved in their small church communities, individuals did not necessarily share the same theological outlook, or see the same need for ecumenism. It was revealing to observe a series of meetings of local Christians who were preparing to be involved in dialogue with local Muslims. Participants were all very active members of their respective churches yet they demonstrated a variety of theological stances and interests, including sympathy for belief in reincarnation and a considerable questioning of some of the basic tenets of Christianity. Again, it is clear



that the varying degrees of religious observance do not indicate a particular degree of theological literacy.

### *6.5. Religious Identity and Motivation for Action*

Potentially related to this uneasy relationship with theology, for many living in Beeston Hill there was a strong emphasis on 'right action' over 'right belief' in their religious identity. This was noted by interviewee G, who is herself not religious but has an important role in the local community:

...the idea of faith is strong but it's faith that, for most people their religious faith takes the form of looking to see what good can be done in the community and how people can be brought together whether those people believe in God or not, or believe in each other really (March 2005).

Equally, there was not a great desire among any of the respondents interviewed to discuss theological ideas in detail. One respondent, a notable local community activist, commented that:

I am ecumenical, I'm the ecumenical officer for the Churches Together. I've just got a very, very simple faith, and I just take the bit where it said in the Bible if you believe like a child you're fine, you're OK. That's OK for me. I'm not worried about deep theological things you know, so it's quite a simple faith (Interviewee B, July 2004).

This comment has important ramifications for the role of inter-faith theology in local community settings. This woman was credited as being one of the early local drivers for Christians to work with Muslims in the area. However, she was informed by a 'simple' faith and had no knowledge of the theological debates and schools of thought regarding inter-faith dialogue. Religious identity is not, as may appear to be the case in the dominant discourse, a monolithic structure. It is affected by a variety of influences and is expressed in ways that demonstrate this variety. It is rarely, at the domestic level, affected by the kind of debates which are held at inter-faith conferences on a regular basis. The Anglican Vicar of Beeston Hill expressed this in some reflections which were published in a diocesan newsletter following the 2005 London bombings:

Inter-faith dialogue in Beeston Hill is not an intellectual exercise pursued by individuals who are interested in that kind of thing. It is a succession of ordinary everyday life encounters between people who come from different backgrounds. These encounters enlarge our vision of God's presence among us and are therefore very precious (Shaw, 2005).

These comments will be referred to further below as they offer a useful insight into the failure of inter-faith theology to influence the local community discourse. However, his



reference to 'ordinary everyday life encounters' is significant in indicating the role of the mundane and the practical in religious identity. This emphasis on action appears to me to be differently expressed among Muslims and Christians.

For many of the Christian activists in Faith Together in Leeds 11 their involvement in the project was described along theological lines. Even for interviewee B who was 'not worried about deep theological things' she nevertheless saw her role in theological terms. She talked about 'doing good works' and 'serving others' in Christian theological language. However, some Christian groups in Beeston Hill, notably the Jesus Army, have a much more evangelical theological motivation. Although they use the Building Blocks centre for their meetings, they do not have significant involvement with other ecumenical activities. They are unlike other local churches in that they have a strong emphasis on evangelising local Muslims. Although there were no Pakistani-heritage Muslims at the meeting I observed there were several asylum seekers who had joined this church and were all converts from Islam, mainly Iranians and Afghans. Biblical passages were translated into Farsi during the meeting.

Whereas for Christians there was an emphasis on theological motivation for action in the local community, although this did not equate to an emphasis on 'right belief'; for Muslims there was less religious content to reflections about Faith Together in Leeds 11 and identity. Employees at both Hamara and Building Blocks were employed as community workers rather than having any religious implications for their post. However, whereas project leaders from the Muslim community were community activists rather than religious figures, the leaders from the Christian community were mainly, though not exclusively, ministers rather than lay people. For Muslim community workers such as interviewee L, his motivation for working with Christians was not different than his motivation for working with Muslims. He noted in interview that: 'working with the Christian community is, for me, no different to working with a Muslim community ... the Islamic faith teaches to serve others basically' (June 2006). Interviewee H, one of the principal figures in the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project, also noted the often recounted fact that: 'the Muslim faith is very much sort of intertwined with general day to day life in the community and what have you' (June 2004). Therefore, the difference between religious and communal motivation for involvement in such work was, he felt, difficult to disentangle. However, the need to act for a community was an important motivation for Muslim respondents, as opposed to



the Christian emphasis on good works for theological reasons. Interviewee M for example commented that: 'I need to do something where I feel like I'm doing something more for the community that I'm living in' (June 2006).

To some extent, there are different types of motivation for Christians and Muslims involving themselves in co-working with the other faith and with the state. There is an emphasis on action and some distancing from and suspicion of theology among Christians. The nature of identity is fundamental to this discussion. For many Muslims in Beeston Hill the conflation of religious with ethnic identity, and related socio-economic concerns makes concern to serve the community fundamentally practical, and also draws on a religious heritage which sees the religious and the political or practical as mutually significant. For Christians however the desire to serve the community was born out of concern for fundamental teachings, such as those of Jesus, which were important elements of the Christian identity of individuals. Traditional dominant discourses of theology were notably absent from discussions. The emphasis on the practical, and on action over theology in the religious identity of the people of Beeston Hill, is of particular significance to the arena of inter-faith theology, which often fails to relate to the lived experience of such religiously diverse neighbourhoods, as was discussed in chapter three, and as will be considered in more detail below in chapter nine. The nature of local religious identity is also important for relations with the state, through funding bodies and organisations seeking representatives or consultation. At this level the complexity of religious identity, and of its relationship to other aspects of identity are often under-recognised. Secular identities, both of individuals and of the public sphere itself, further confuse relations between the state and faith communities.

### *6.6. Secular Identities*

Identity in Beeston Hill is clearly not expressed entirely through religion. This is because firstly there are many influences on identity, but also because there are many people locally who do not have any religious activity in their lives. It has already been noted how this tendency was strongest among the autochthonous population, and indeed the only two interviewees who described themselves as atheist were white. However, this did not detract from their acknowledgement of the significance of religion in the area. For example, interviewee J noted when reflecting on the role of faith leaders in the community that:



They are important for people. And I suppose its even more in the white community that the number of practising Christians must be a pretty small percentage and then there's a whole section who'd still look and say "Well I'm a Christian and I don't know who the vicar is but I'm sure he's a good bloke and I'd look to him" (March 2006).

Interviewee G (March 2005) also felt that religion 'is certainly not a disadvantage' to the Faith Together project. Taking a strategic perspective, she also commented that:

...now these days rather than just talking about the just community and voluntary sector, people say voluntary, community and faith sector. So it just gives you more choice really because you can apply to faith funds, if there's such things, as well as to community and voluntary sector funds.

This demonstrates the importance of the funding environment for the approach and emphasis of community projects, an issue to which we will return in chapter eight. In this context, she felt that religion 'lends respectability sometimes'. Interestingly, this was in contrast to some of the religious respondents who felt that religion was sometimes a problem when making funding applications because there was concern about public money being put to religious use, such as the promotion of religion, which would be deemed an unacceptable use of public funds.

Interviewee J expressed concern however, especially after the London bombings, that people without a religion were losing out in terms of representation. He noted the way in which the local council had approached religious leaders after July 2005, and the emphasis on the religions during that period. He commented:

But then what about the rest of us? And I'm a fairly sort of thought through, conscious atheist, but I suspect most people aren't. Most people who don't have a faith don't even think about it that much so there's this sort of mish mash. I'm quite keen to sort of bolster the secular nature of, so this development trust that we're trying to set up, at one point we tried to set down principles and aims and objectives and what have you but we ran out of treacle and stopped, a bit of a waste of time. But one of the things I was putting forward and still want to when we become a bit more established, is that we are, we have some clarity that we are a secular project (March 2006).<sup>148</sup>

In contrast, for interviewee N particularly the need to express a religious identity in what he considered an overwhelmingly secular society was paramount in his community work, and commented that: 'as people of faith we wanted to make an assertion that faith matters ... when you're up against a secular culture its more

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<sup>148</sup> The 'development trust' refers to a group which were seeking to appropriate a former primary school as a community centre.



important to stand together for faith' (November 2004). There is therefore an interesting tension between a secular community worker attempting to bolster the secular nature of society, and a Christian community worker attempting to bolster the Christian nature of society. Both found common ground on which to work, and expressed considerable respect for one another's position.

While local atheists could see the benefit of religion to the local community, the experience of some local Muslims and Christians was that a generally secular society was unreasonable in its expectations of small Christian congregations. Interviewee B commented on her experience of involvement in one local community group that: 'I always feel when I go to these meetings that I have to take what they say and try and defend the church congregation' (July 2004). Local Muslim men despaired of the declining influence of religion in the area, one of them commenting that: 'Times change you know. Those days, church was full of people. Now, how many people go the church? People's believing is changed' (Hamara Men's Group, June 2006). In this context, the church bells were a motif that reappeared in both interviews with Muslims and in observations and informal conversations. For example, interviewee M commented that she:

...could hear the church bells ringing when I was younger. But you know as society has kind of become more and more secular and the churches have kind of become more and more sort of empty, its really, really sad because I just don't hear it any longer (June 2006).

In terms of contact between people who consider themselves Christian or Muslim there are significant issues about what it means to be a Christian or to be a Muslim. The influence of secularity, the different ways theology influences life, different acceptable levels of religious observance, the variety of motivations for action, and the issues of ethnicity and socio-economic status are all relevant whenever people make contact with one another. Whereas in a formal dialogue setting there may be assumptions made about others, particularly that they are primarily defining themselves as religious, this is much more open in an informal setting. Informally, questions about identity are left open. It is more likely that those with a tenuous link to a religion will be drawn into dialogue in its widest sense. In many ways, this is the intention behind community cohesion projects: that contact between people increases the likelihood of them 'getting on' with each other. However, as we have seen here, this does not take into account the religious significance that such contact may have. In an environment where the dominant



theological discourse actually has very little currency, the demotic theological discourse is guided by experience and a desire to serve, either theologically or socially motivated. The space in which this informal dialogue occurs is therefore important as the passive vessel for personal identity as well as a dynamic influence on personal identity.

### *6.7. The Identity of the Buildings*

As well as people having and negotiating identities, it can be argued that the space created by the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project also has a specific identity. This relates to, and is influenced by, the identities of the people who use the space, but is also created by the community leaders and funding bodies who created the space. Although Faith Together in Leeds 11 includes partners who are not located in the two community centres, it is Hamara and Building Blocks which are the principal, recognisable, 'space' of Faith Together in Leeds 11.

As was demonstrated in chapter four, Building Blocks does not have a strong physical identity as a church. However, the physical lack of emphasis on the Christian nature of the building, especially on the exterior, does not relate to a management lack of emphasis. One of the non-religious Faith Together in Leeds 11 board members described Building Blocks:

...the land belongs to the Church of England, the Anglican Church, the parish church in fact, and then the worship is Methodist although I think the Holy Spirit uses it as well. Their opening was definitely a Christian occasion there were quite a number of vicars and canons that I haven't seen in the place since but they're on the board, and they determine various things that happen in the building. So Faith Together as such only really has the building from 9 to 6 weekdays and the rest of the time its run through the Methodists and that board (Interviewee G, March 2005).

The space has a Christian identity but it is a space that is opened to all sectors of the community, and is used by all parts of the community. This relates in large part to the attitude of those involved in the day-to-day running of Building Blocks. A Muslim community worker noted that:

...it's not about the building or what happens in the building it's about how you're made to feel when you access the building, and whether or not you're expected to conform with things that go against your beliefs or values. And Building Blocks doesn't do that because it just doesn't and that's why the women who go there they feel welcome, they feel respected (Interviewee R, February 2006).

In this sense the building is a passive vessel for the open and inclusive identities of the Christians who lead the work in Building Blocks. However, Muslims use and respect



the building as a community space but also respect it as a church. In that sense the religious identity of the space is active, it defines what happens and how people relate to it. The same community worker from the Hamara centre shared an anecdote during an interview which demonstrates the way in which the religious and community nature of the building are both apparent:

...the only time it became an issue, that it became distinct that it was a church environment we were interacting with, was when we asked to borrow the podium one day. And it was a pulpit and it had a crucifix on the front you know, so what we did was we used something to cover it because it was a community event, it wasn't appropriate but we needed a podium and we ended up with a pulpit and it was quite comical because you know we were thinking are we going to cause offence? Because one of the senior professionals that came, she was chairing the day she's from a Catholic background, although she's no longer Catholic, and she was joking with me and saying 'you could get done for this one' because I draped a banner around it. And I had to ask myself would this cause offence and I asked ... and she said it wasn't. I hope it didn't. That was the only thing that made me think, oh, this at the end of the day is a church environment (Interviewee R, February 2006).

Those of no faith interviewed during the research process were not very conscious of the space being a church and, in some cases they did not notice the large wooden cross on the wall of the main room. So, the space has a religious identity, it is indeed a sacred space, but this has not acted to dissuade those who do not share this faith from using the space and indeed it is barely consciously recognised by those who do not consider themselves religious.

Although Hamara has a prayer room and a distinct Muslim identity it is not a religious building and local religious leaders do not have any official part in the running of the centre. In part, this may relate to the lack of interest or ability to participate in such activities from local Muslim religious leaders, a trend noted in other studies (Farnell, Furbey, Shams Al-Haqq Hills, Macey, & Smith, 2003: 16; Runnymede Trust, 1997: 17). One of the Hamara community workers commented that:

...they made a conscious decision to employ the right people in here so that they had the right people, and not to let politics or religion interfere and fortunately, or unfortunately, our religious leaders are not as educated in other fields. Generally that's a let down. Whereas in other faiths, whether its Christianity or Judaism, their faith leaders have other education in addition to their religious education, that's the difference. It's not because of a conflict, its because of the right skills, that's all. In fact the chair of our board used at one time to be a member of the management committee for one of the mosques so there is that cross over in the people (Interviewee L, June 2006).



Although there is a cross-over in personnel however, this does not relate to a cross-over in activities. The Muslim identity of the space is expressed much less institutionally. Interviewee G, a non-religious community activist with an office in the Hamara Centre described it:

In terms of religious faith, certainly South Leeds Elderly and Community Group which then became Hamara is very much Muslim, having said which events don't start with a prayer. There have been specifically religious events like the community cohesion event for the breaking of the Ramadan fast last autumn but other events are secular in tone and that was also true of the opening of Hamara, it was a secular occasion. But there's no doubt that a lot of people are Muslim (March 2005).

For Muslim women in particular, the Hamara centre creates a safe environment in an area where there is limited space in mosques for their activities and therefore 'finding somewhere else to be able to congregate for educational purposes or religious purposes is really important to them' (Interviewee R, February 2006). The Hamara space becomes Muslim space because of the people who use it.

I've noticed that Building Blocks with a name like Building Blocks and the facilities it provides, it's not a church, you know, or it doesn't appear to be a church and it doesn't scream church from the outside either. And Hamara doesn't scream kind of Muslim or Asian or anything like that. ... I think that people realise that Building Blocks is church based but you know and people do use the centre from the Muslim community, the crèche especially when there are events going on at Hamara and things like that. But I don't know I suppose its probably easier to see that Building Blocks is more faith run because it is a church you know and it is a place of worship, and we have a prayer room upstairs in Hamara but it's a Healthy Living Centre its got a very different you know kind of emphasis. So, I think it's a slightly different balance (Interviewee A, August 2004).

However, despite a less religious identity, Hamara is not as well used by all sectors of the population as Building Blocks. This is partly, as has been noted, because the roots of the Hamara centre are in a community group for South Asian elders. However, the centre is intended to be a resource for the whole community. As interviewee G noted:

And again I think people who come here will know that it is or would assume that people are Muslims, I think the faith element - there might be white people who think we couldn't go to Hamara because it is all for Asians, or it is all for Muslims, but even if they thought it is all for Muslims they wouldn't think they couldn't go because they are white. It would be more of a racial distinction that they would be making since 9/11 expressed religious but pre 9/11 would have been 'they're all Asians'. So, some people might, and I think do, think that if you're white you're not wanted at Hamara. I don't know how widespread that is and it would be interesting to find out (March 2005).



The perception among several people I interviewed was that there were difficulties with white people accessing Hamara, for instance:

And there still seem to be some fairly wide spread perceptions in the local community about what these buildings are and who they're for. The perception is that this is the white building and that is the Asian building. And there are reported sort of incidents of an unfriendly reception for white people at Hamara particularly. I don't think such specific allegations have been levelled here but again whether that's a sort of racist skewing of things I don't know (Interviewee J, March 2006).

One of the leading Christian figures in the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project had observed even at official meetings that there was a misunderstanding about the nature of the two buildings:

But I've heard people the other side of the park say Building Blocks was for white people, and Hamara was for Muslim people, as a matter of record, at community meetings and so on. And there's been councillors sat there and they haven't disputed it, they haven't said well that's not true. I had to get the minutes of the Beeston Forum corrected because they said as much, and I said well this isn't true (Interviewee N, June 2006).

These confusions and concerns were recognised by staff at Hamara. One of the senior members of staff recognised a need to broaden provision for the whole community but shared with many interviewees a concern about where these attitudes to Hamara had their origin:

One of the things I question is with this perception, is where does it come from and why has it been created and I've more or less convinced myself that it comes from a very small sector of the community who are proactive in promoting it and the reasons behind it I think are linked to jealousy, and I think it's a jealousy of the organisation. ... The other thing that you could question is why is it when a white organisation has wonderful access and nobody criticises it for being white led, nobody even raises it as an issue. But if a minority ethnic community have power and control in something of prestige or provision suddenly it's a big thing. And to me that's jealousy and racism, raising its head at some level (Interviewee R, February 2006).

Certainly, based on my observations, it is clear that the white population particularly only rarely use Hamara. I was asked whether the classes in Hamara were held in English, demonstrating that there was concern about whether the activities on offer at Hamara were open to all. As a result of the history of the Hamara project the types of courses and activities on offer are principally aimed at the South Asian population, and the majority of employees also share this background.



There is an emphasis on providing culturally sensitive services, as was noted by a senior member of staff at Building Blocks:

The focus at Hamara was always to have that cultural understanding because it was originally to be a centre for Asian elderly people who felt that normal luncheon groups and things like that weren't culturally sensitive. So I think that element has remained [in activities] they are doing other than working with the elderly (Interviewee W, February 2005).

The Hamara space, unlike Building Blocks, does not have a specific religious identity but it is mainly used by a very specific community - Pakistani Muslims.<sup>149</sup> Efforts were continually being made to break down these barriers, including events such as the multicultural street market which utilised both buildings:

...this is why part of one of the things about the multicultural market was they had the café because we wanted people to go in there, because people think that's just for Asians, its just an Asian centre and they can't go in it, why's the government giving them money, you know, all this prejudicial sort of stuff. So we said right if you have the café we'll get people to go in and then say to them you can come in any time you want. So we're trying to break down the barriers (Interviewee B, July 2004).

The responses so far covered demonstrate the extent to which the two buildings have multiple and overlapping identities in much the same way as the people who use them. However, there is some difference in the ways in which those identities are expressed, especially between those who have leadership roles and those who use the buildings as clients. Those in leadership roles demonstrate the extent to which they have become socialised into the dominant discourse around community cohesion, while clients who represent the demotic discourse around the buildings express the identity of the buildings somewhat differently. This is best expressed around the issue of how well known 'Faith Together in Leeds 11' as the overarching project is. Whereas for

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<sup>149</sup> Although this was not an issue that could be followed up within the constraints of this study, one respondent noted that:

...there are then political kind of groupings within the community so for some Hamara is kind of the enemy because its not kind of within their kind of ethnographic tribal clique you know so that's why its kind of, I'm using the word enemy but tribally its not set up by the same sort of people, not even tribally because I suppose within the south Asian context you don't have tribes its more, you've come across the *biradari* system haven't you? It's more you're not from the same *biradari*, which is kind of like a clan or a tribe, so therefore there are problems. ... So anyway I said "why don't you do x, y and z" and she said "oh because I've got x, y and z on", and I thought "ok at face value I can take it" but deeper I know its because her husband is working on a different thing that's not to do with Hamara, and it's a separate clan, it's a separate system going on so that also has an impact on the community because there's a community division there, you know (Interviewee M, June 2006).

Clearly, the issues involved in access to community resources are considerably more confused than a simplistic reading might indicate.



interviewee H 'Faith Together in Leeds 11 is very well known in the locality' (June 2004), others, such as interviewee L pointed out that this really only extended to local officials, rather than local residents:

I think some people are aware but not as aware as we would like them to be. I think our partner agencies are aware. The local government offices around here, they're aware. As for the community, people are aware that we work together we are partners but I'm not so sure whether they're aware that faith plays an important part in this (June 2006).

Indeed, interviewee J suspected that: 'People are aware of Building Blocks and Hamara - they're not aware of Faith Together as a sort of overarching thing. I'm not sure how much they're aware the projects are linked, even' (March 2006). To some extent this was borne out by my observations. In general, there was limited knowledge about Faith Together in Leeds 11, some knowledge that the centres were linked, and some knowledge that religion was involved, even if only because people recognised that the buildings were previously church buildings. In some senses this is unsurprising. People use the buildings on the basis of need, whereas those who manage the buildings are involved at a more strategic level with the nature and identity of the buildings. Interviewee M identified this distinction:

I'm kind of thinking with two heads on at once, and sometimes its kind of difficult to differentiate because I'm a resident and I get that kind of feeling of what the community thinks but yet as staff and kind of board we have a clearer vision I think of what we'd like it to be and how we'd like it to impact on the community (June 2006).

Those involved at a management level with projects such as Faith Together in Leeds 11 spend a considerable amount of time interacting with a government funding agenda. This agenda requires them to think in terms of outcomes and evidence that demonstrate community cohesion. Individuals in management positions were overwhelmingly positive about the concept of community cohesion, and indeed their involvement in the project stemmed from deep personal commitment to improved relations between local people. However, it was apparent that to some extent the desire to see these outcomes was greater than the outcomes themselves. A good example of this was the community café at Hamara centre. This provided good quality, cheap Asian food usually dhal, meat or fish 'curry', rice, salad and chapattis for around £2. Many interviewees held up the community café as a good example of different people having the opportunity to interact with one another. They pointed out that the majority South Asian clientele was now supplemented by a good number of 'white faces'. However, one interviewee noted



something which I had concluded from my own observations; although there were often several white faces at the café they were not necessarily local residents. In fact, they were often professionals such as police officers, teachers, medical staff and others working for agencies with local offices. In itself, this was no bad thing. The opportunity for interaction was still important and significant. A local Christian leader commented on several occasions about the conversations he had with local Muslims and how frequently the conversations turned to God. Yet he was himself an example of a local professional white person using the café, rather than the local disadvantaged population who might have been in particular need of good, cheap, food.

This influence of the government funding agenda on the identity of the buildings was also notable in the way the emphasis moved from the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project itself to the separate buildings over the period of my fieldwork. One of the project leaders noted that: ‘You could always present them as a coherent whole but the trouble is there are times when it is easier to get funding by not doing that’ (Interviewee N, November 2004). Other factors also influenced the changing nature of the relationship between the two buildings. Hamara grew very quickly and has a large body of staff, whereas Building Blocks remained small and has constantly struggled with funding. Although all the interviewees expressed support for the continuing relationship between the two buildings, it was a member of Vera Media, one of the community group partners in Faith Together in Leeds 11 which has offices in the Hamara centre, who most emphasised the need to focus on the joint nature of the project.

I think it is very important that we keep the identity of Faith Together in Leeds 11 even though SRB4 funding has come to the end. And we’re not just different centres. And it is important on a broadly political sense in that community cohesion is very important and it is also important for fundraising in that the larger your partnership the more likely you are to get funding. It also makes sense because we can be a key player in influencing what happens locally and we can hopefully provide an integrated service to local people. So for all those reasons it makes every sense in the world for us to operate quite closely together and not to just drift off and go our own way (Interviewee G, March 2005).

Again, it is notable that the funding agenda as well as ideological motivations provoked her to seek this continued close working.

Clearly, the identity of the two community centres is confused and interrelated. Who uses the buildings, when and how, is linked to what the buildings are perceived to be. Hamara is seen as non-religious and serving ethnic minority groups, so it makes sense



for a Pentecostal church with a majority African congregation to meet for Sunday worship there. Equally, because the majority of the local population are Muslim it is unsurprising that the religious identity they bring to the space has a significant impact on how the buildings are perceived. Whether this is expressed in terms of ethnicity or religion the building is not as accessible for the whole population. Building Blocks however, despite being a tangibly Christian space, is seen as accessible to all. It is possible that in some ways the overt religious identity of the space makes it more accessible as there are seen to be no hidden agendas. However, this is simply conjecture.

As the two buildings have been the principal location for the fieldwork on which this study is based it is unsurprising that the identity of the buildings should be so important. They are the spaces in which Muslims and Christians, and others, informally come into contact with one another and thus into a dialogical relationship. How the space is active in this dialogue is of unavoidable concern.

#### *6.8. Conclusion: Identity and Dialogue*

As has been shown, for Muslims and Christians coming into contact, and therefore dialogue, there are many contextual factors which influence how religious identity is expressed and understood. As well as factors such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and the secular environment which influence how religious identity is understood and articulated, there are also issues internal to Islam and Christianity which were found to be important in this study. Different degrees of religious observance, the effect of contact with people of other religions, the role of theology and the relationship between belief and action all impact on how religious identity is understood and expressed, both internally and externally to individuals and communities. To ignore these is to do a disservice to the potential variety possible in inter-faith dialogue and relations. As will be explored in detail in chapter nine, Muslims and Christians are in dialogue in the Faith Together in Leeds 11 space, but they are not in dialogue as representatives or as paradigmatic followers of their religion, as appears to be the expectation in formal inter-faith dialogue. Instead, they are involved in dialogue on a variety of levels, with a variety of influences on the conversations that occur; for instance, a shared identity as of a 'minority ethnic' community, but a different religious identity, or a shared religious identity, but different socio-economic identity. People in Beeston Hill are also not



concerned with deep theological discussions about the nature of identity, or motivations for action, but with the continuing effort at living together more harmoniously.

This desire to live more harmoniously, and the ‘social capital’ of faith communities, is of particular interest to the state. As will be discussed in chapter eight, the state seeks to employ religious identity both for representation and consultation but also in order to utilise the resources of the faith communities. However, this is often framed within a simplistic understanding of religious identity which does not do justice to the complexity and diversity to be found in a neighbourhood such as Beeston Hill. Often, the version of religious identity, both communal and individual, is articulated by leaders, either local or national. These leaders are not necessarily rooted in the lived reality of religiously diverse neighbourhoods, and as such do not provide the bridge the state may hope for between the dominant and the demotic discourses of community and identity. Although groups and individuals may make use of dominant discourses to pursue their plans, for instance with regard to accessing funding, they do this while simultaneously understanding the more complex nature of demotic discourses, which may conflate religion with *biradari* or ethnicity, neighbourhood or class in constantly evolving and creative ways. Clearly, the nature and articulation of identity in the lived reality of a religiously diverse neighbourhood is therefore continually implicated and significant in the dialogue between Muslims and Christians in these neighbourhoods.



## Chapter 7: Crisis and Community

In the previous chapter some of the multiple and contested constructions and articulations of identity in Beeston Hill were explored. This helped to advance an argument that dominant discourses of identity, religion and inter-faith dialogue have less significance in religiously diverse neighbourhoods than the demotic discourse around the reality of living in an ethnically, socially and religiously diverse neighbourhood. The construction and articulation of personal identity is intricately concerned with the nature and boundaries of religious, ethnic, geographical or other 'communities'. Community, like identity, is a contested term. The early efforts to define different senses of community by Ferdinand Tönnies in the 1880s relied on concepts of belonging and contractual obligations. In more recent literature the significance of the boundary (Cohen, 1985) and of the use, rather than meaning, of the word community (Plant, 1974) have been explored. It now appears to be universally accepted that the use of the term community is so varied and contested that the only acceptable way forward is to identify what is meant by community in any given context, and accept that in different contexts there may be different operational definitions (Knott, 2000a: 94). In practical realms such as community work it is also accepted that, 'community must remain an essentially contested concept' (Popple, 1995: 3). However, the term community is still used in both dominant and demotic discourses with a range of meanings which are often under-explored.

In this chapter, the nature of community and the dominant and demotic constructions and uses of the term community will be considered. How and why communities are identified and used in demotic and dominant discourses relates not only to policy agendas around community cohesion and regeneration, but also to concepts of inter-faith dialogue. Inter-faith dialogue is often theorised as being dialogue between communities rather than individuals. As with identity discourses, when the nature and articulation of community is problematised, so too are discourses around inter-faith dialogue which rely on assumed and untested categories of 'religion' and 'faith community'. The demotic discourse of community, as Baumann identified (1996), relies on varied articulations and constructions which relate in different ways at different times to the dominant discourses which tend to assert uniformity and a single shared construct.



An unexpected opportunity to observe the implications of this distance between dominant and demotic discourses of community was available in the aftermath of the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 London bombings. The limitations placed on the fieldwork by events has been discussed in chapter five, but included most prominently the inability to access young people and the members of local mosques for interviews. Despite this fundamental difficulty, it was nevertheless possible to obtain information both informally through my existing fieldwork contacts, and formally through media reports, documents such as press releases, and some interviews. The discovery that three of the young men who bombed London were linked to Beeston Hill placed the area under the media spotlight, and brought to the fore both tensions and areas of cohesion within the local population. Events demonstrated the importance of pre-existing patterns of relationship, the extent to which the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project had become significant in the local community, and also the intricacies of identity, leadership and representation which, it is argued, should be more fully appreciated in theologies of inter-faith dialogue and state discourses around inter-faith relations.

### *7.1. Events Following 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005*

On 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005, during the morning rush hour, four bombs were detonated in London by young, Muslim, men. Three bombs were detonated virtually simultaneously on Underground trains, one slightly later on a bus. All four British-born bombers were killed, becoming the first suicide bombers on British soil.<sup>150</sup> The events of the day and the following weeks have been recounted both through the print and broadcast media and in the official government report (2006). On 12<sup>th</sup> July early morning raids on homes and businesses across Leeds, including Beeston Hill, provided the first indication that there was a probable link between Leeds residents and the bombings. During that day a press release appeared calling for a two minute silence to be held in front of the Hamara centre on 14<sup>th</sup> July, as across the country. By 14<sup>th</sup> July, in hot stifling weather, people were being evacuated from streets in Beeston Hill and army bomb disposal unit vehicles were arriving to deal with potential explosive material. A large gathering of people who live or work in the local area took part in the two minute silence under the invasive gaze of journalists from around the world. Addressing those gathered, the Imam of a local mosque, speaking through an interpreter, condemned the bombings as 'unIslamic'. The Methodist Minister also made a speech, asserting that the families of the men involved in the bombings were still welcome in Beeston. Those gathered were principally white,

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<sup>150</sup> British born suicide bombers had previously operated in Israel (Awan, 2007).



with many members of the local Christian congregations present. Other than staff from the Hamara centre there were only a few South Asian or Muslim participants. The fact that many local streets were being, or had been, evacuated was held responsible for the relatively low number of residents from the immediately surrounding area. In the weeks that followed events were held, such as a walk to the centre of Leeds and a coach trip to deliver books of condolence to London, to demonstrate the sorrow of local people, and to reinforce a sense of community spirit.

By November 2005 the overt presence of the media had diminished, although it later transpired that there were several 'undercover' journalists operating in the area. Three community meetings were, coincidentally, held in quick succession. On 14<sup>th</sup> November a meeting which was part of a series under the title 'Trust or Terror' was held in the Hamara centre. On 16<sup>th</sup> November two 'Community Open Forums' were held, one at the Hamara centre and one at a local school. On the 30<sup>th</sup> November an event called 'Deepening the Dialogue', facilitated by a group of Process Psychologists from around the world, was held at the Hamara centre. These three meetings had very different facilitators and audiences and the responses to them were revealing, as will be discussed below. These two significant phases, the events immediately following the bombings and the community meetings some months later, provide the bulk of the observational data for this chapter, supplemented by interview responses and documents such as press releases and newspaper articles. At each stage different issues regarding the construction and articulation of community and community boundaries are highlighted.

## *7.2. Outsiders*

For the people of Beeston Hill there were a variety of 'outsiders' with whom they had to negotiate in the aftermath of 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005. These included the police, the media, local and national dignitaries, and groups seeking to assist the local area and people. Particularly in the early stages, the police were the most obvious outsiders present in the area. Some local residents expressed concern that the police acted too visibly and dramatically in the first instance, drawing great attention to the area, and heightening tension and anxiety. However, later searches and arrests were handled less overtly. A special telephone line existed for local residents who were concerned about a potential rise in hate crime. Nevertheless, the only person with whom I came into contact who believed they were the victim of a hate crime following the bombings did not feel they received appropriate support or investigation. A general sense that the police would not



necessarily help seemed to pervade many conversations between South Asian Muslims and asylum seekers during the English language classes at which I assisted. This may be related to several issues, and would require further study to unravel. However, it is important to note that the people of Beeston have a complex relationship with the police which was evident in 2004 following the gang-related murder of a local youth, Tyrone Clark (D. Bruce & Heslett, 2004). Within this environment, the response from local people to the apparent failings of the police presence was not as marked as may have been expected. In other cities, including nearby Bradford in 1995, conflict between South Asian youths and the police has resulted in rioting (Macey, 2007).

The issue of outsiders seeking to assist the community in coming to terms with what had happened provoked some strong responses, as well as disinterest. Although visitors such as the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, and Sir Iqbal Sacranie of the Muslim Council of Britain, were welcomed, and there was some interest in their presence, there was also some suspicion that such luminaries were attempting to get a piece of the media spotlight. These visits were not greeted with the same degree of interest and excitement as the presence of former MP Tony Benn and his son, Hillary, the local MP, at the official opening of the Hamara centre in December 2004. Suspicion of outside 'do-gooders' was particularly observed concerning a group of Process Psychologists who travelled to Beeston Hill to facilitate a meeting at the Hamara centre entitled 'Deepening the Dialogue' as part of Leeds' annual 'Together for Peace' festival. Shortly before the meeting a local Christian community leader expressed to me the deep local suspicion felt concerning the group, and his expectation that there would be few local Muslims present. The Process Psychologists were asked not to attend a community meeting organised by the local community forum, demonstrating some concern about their involvement at an organisational as well as personal level. At the Deepening the Dialogue event the majority of participants were white and many were not locally resident. This was partly because the event had been advertised across Leeds. Some negative feeling concerning those facilitating the meeting was expressed, alongside more positive responses. There was a sense among participants, expressed by a number of those present both informally and during the discussions that the facilitators had come 'to fix something that didn't need fixing'. A female member of the Holy Spirit Anglican church told me that she felt this sort of event was building barriers rather than removing them. In the following year, when efforts were made by 'Together for Peace'



to organise further events, a local Christian leader argued in a widely circulated email that:

Public meetings last November, which were called to give people space to reflect together on the events of last July, drew very muted support and those who did attend spent a lot of the time talking about other issues, and looking forward, rather than looking back to the events of 7 July (Interviewee N, email A, March 2006).

This is a characterisation of the meetings which I recognised from my own observations. A meeting organised at Hamara by the Anglican church as part of the 'Trust or Terror' series, equally drew limited participation from local Muslims, although the first in the series, held a year previously at the Building Blocks centre, had attracted a number of local Muslims and Christians. The theme concerned religion and the family, and was well received by the Christians present from across Leeds. It was unclear whether it was the experience of the initial meeting, or post 7<sup>th</sup> July suspicion which had led to the limited involvement and interest from local Muslims. A young, local, female, Muslim told me that she felt both were probably implicated but that a much more significant feature was that local Muslims were simply not interested in these meetings, and had attended the first out of duty and curiosity rather than a sustained interest. This is a response which will be explored in detail in the following chapter. However, it is useful to note that where community was loosely defined, and where an external body was seeking to involve itself in this assumed community, local Muslims did not consider themselves a necessary part of the community identified.

Of the three community meetings which I observed during this period the best attended was that organised by the local community forum. As the only researcher given express permission in advance to attend the meeting, it was clear that the community forum had a strong sense of ownership of the meeting, and a desire to protect the space. This was evident when a journalist from the local newspaper asked permission at the beginning of the meeting to report on it. Although the journalist was given permission, elderly South Asian Muslims, particularly men, expressed their reservations and challenged the journalist about the conduct of the media. As a day time meeting, it was unsurprisingly dominated by retired or non-working local residents. However, there was a good representation of local South Asians, including Sikhs, which indicated both a more positive attitude to the group organising the meeting, but also the efforts of local 'gatekeepers', who clearly had encouraged people to attend. The content of the meeting became focused on very practical issues such as litter and rubbish collection, and



provision for young people in the area. Again, this concern with practical issues, and a desire to express specific needs in a forum where they might be acted upon, probably increased the appeal of this sort of meeting. Other, less practical meetings were more easily dismissed as time-wasting. Also, this concern with the apparently everyday and mundane relates the meeting more clearly to a demotic understanding of what the local community 'is': people who live locally and are concerned about shared and immediate issues. In this sense the dominant state discourse which associates community generally with small neighbourhoods can be seen to be successful. Whereas the other community meetings attempted to tap into more diffuse or contentious understandings of community, whether geographical or religious, this meeting was more accessible because of the possibility of relating the outcomes and content to the lived reality of the Beeston Hill neighbourhood. When this neighbourhood was seen to be under attack, by external bodies with a negative agenda, different demotic articulations of community were often used, such as those based on religion and ethnicity, to assert and defend boundaries.

An example of an intrusion into the area based on an external body with a negative agenda was that of the British National Party (the BNP). The BNP held a meeting at a local public house in the weeks following 7<sup>th</sup> July. Very little information beyond this basic fact is available, and it is impossible to know what proportion of those present were local residents. The meeting was deeply unsettling to local South Asians, who were probably alerted to it via the local Respect party and the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight*.<sup>151</sup> Among the women at the English class where I assisted, new rumours were regularly shared related to the BNP and racism more generally; these included that members of the BNP had encouraged people to firebomb the family homes of the bombers, that a Muslim taxi driver had been murdered by racists, and that Muslim girls were having their headscarves pulled off at school. I was unable to find any evidence to substantiate these rumours, however, the fact that they existed and were taken seriously demonstrates that despite the positive work which was undertaken to address fear, local Muslim elders were scared about a possible back-lash. Here the community under attack was seen as the South Asian Muslims of Beeston Hill, which was both concerned to

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<sup>151</sup> Respect, 'The Unity Coalition', is a socialist political party which was formed in 2003 following the anti-Iraq war demonstrations. The party has achieved considerable support among Muslim voters disillusioned with the Labour party particularly following the Iraq war. *Searchlight* magazine has been in existence for twenty five years and seeks to reveal fascist and racist activities. The primary focus of the magazine in recent years has been the British National Party and their increasing electoral success.



defend itself, and was defended by local white political activists from the Respect party. The nature of the external threat, a right wing racist organisation, itself defined the community under attack as South Asian Muslim.

By far the most commented upon and intrusive presence in the area was that of the media. Initially, this was in the form of a large number of photographers and reporters in the streets of Beeston Hill. During the two minute silence on 16<sup>th</sup> July the only things to be heard were the sirens of police and military vehicles and the click of the photographers' cameras. I noted in my fieldwork journal that it was clear from this early point that the media were going to be very intrusive, and this might cause resentment locally. However, journalists were treated very politely and were provided with refreshments in the oppressive heat.

The extensive and visible police search of properties in Beeston Hill, the presence of a bomb disposal unit, BNP activity, and the surrounding media coverage undoubtedly had a significant effect on how outsiders viewed Beeston Hill, whether this was as a dangerous place to be avoided, or a place in need of help from those outside. For those working at Building Blocks, the timing of events was particularly detrimental as the new day care nursery was about to open. The image of Beeston Hill that was portrayed made the area unappealing to those seeking this provision. However, strenuous efforts were made by leaders in the local community to portray the neighbourhood in a more positive light. In a press conference organised at the Hamara centre emphasis was placed on Christian support for their Muslim neighbours, Muslim rejection of violence, and the achievements of local people. There was clearly a desire to portray the area positively, partly to protect the area, but also to reduce potential local tensions. Interviewee N described this as part of a broader effort to present Beeston Hill the way local leaders hoped it would be, rather than how it necessarily was. Despite a lack of outside help in dealing with media, local knowledge and expertise concerning the media was used in order to tell the best news story that was possible in the circumstances.

The initial press conference led on to further press interviews with the key players in this conference, particularly the local Methodist minister, and a Muslim community worker, who had both demonstrated an ability to respond positively and forcefully. A local Muslim councillor was also vocal in defending the neighbourhood. Early statements also offered sympathy to the families of the bombers, and saw a rejection of



the word ‘terrorist’ as a description. Alongside this unified response to the media, community events which were organised provided a practical demonstration of the good will between members of the local population:

When bad things happen to your community you wonder about the best way to respond. We have decided that the best way to respond is by standing together in solidarity one with another. For example, on 23<sup>rd</sup> July we walked together from Beeston to Millennium Square to tell the people of Leeds that we are determined not to be divided as a community. On 30<sup>th</sup> July a representative delegation from Beeston travelled to Old St Pancras Church in London to convey the same message and to deliver books of condolence signed by many local people to express our deep sorrow for the events of 7<sup>th</sup> July. These practical inter-faith responses have helped to provide more positive images of Beeston in the media (Shaw, 2005: 4).

These two extremes: the fear of what might happen in Beeston and the desire to project a positive image of the area, were evident in different sections of the media. Relationships with news journalists were particularly fraught, however, other sections of the media were considered less problematic. This was demonstrated when an episode of Songs of Praise, broadcast on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2006, was filmed at the Building Blocks centre.<sup>152</sup> Although there were reservations about some aspects of the programme, on the whole local people were both keen to be involved and pleased with the results. One of the local figures involved in the filming expressed in interview the positive way in which local people wanted to be involved:

It wasn’t just a case of getting on the camera, I think people did want to celebrate something good that they’d done, so the people who came down and pretended they were setting it out for church and so on did so because they wanted to show enthusiasm for the project (Interviewee N, June 2006).

However, he also expressed reservations about the programme, especially about one scene which seemed to give the impression that Muslims and Christians shared the Building Blocks space in a worship context:

We did ask them about that. We did say we weren’t particularly happy about it because it was giving a false ... impression. We said you wouldn’t usually have Muslim people in the kitchen setting out cups and saucers and things while we were setting up for church on the other side, it looks like we’ve all come to do some syncretistic mishmashy [sic] thing you see (ibid.).

In an email this interviewee also drew attention to one other feature of the programme about which he had reservations – the way in which he was encouraged to use the phrase ‘London Bombers’:

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<sup>152</sup> Songs of Praise is a popular, early Sunday evening, Christian religious programme.



I had naturally referred to the subject more indirectly and subtly [sic], in a way that people in Beeston are wont to do unless they are actual supporters of the Bombers' project. While stressing that they were aiming for naturalism and authenticity, the producer then insisted on changing my words - in the interests of clarity. She may be right. The production team were divided in their opinions (Interviewee N, email B March 2006).

The distance between how community leaders and others sought to represent the area, and the needs and interests of the media are apparent in this instance as in much of the media coverage concerning Beeston Hill. However, it is also interesting that the community being presented to the media was often defined by religion: as the events which had sparked media interest were undeniably religious in their importance, so too the perspective which was taken by the media, and those seeking to represent the area, used religion to signify a community under study. However, as was shown in the preceding chapter, religion is not a straightforward identity, and nor does it relate to a singular and straightforward community. The concerns of local residents who were atheists were noted by one interviewee, and are referred to in chapter six, and demonstrate that even locally there was some awareness that a community was being constructed in the dominant discourse of the media and local leadership which was not entirely consistent with the sense of community that, for instance, was mobilised at the community forum meeting.

However, the coverage based on religion provided some insight into how the effect of religion in community and personal life can be oversimplified and misunderstood in dominant discourses. Considering the extent to which Beeston Hill was reported and investigated by the media, it is instructive that there was positive reporting about the area after early sensationalism had dissipated. Elizabeth Poole, in a survey of media representations of Islam in the late 1990s, found that 'news does not 'misrepresent' Muslims as such', but that it simplifies the rich variety of life, informed by the legacy of Orientalism, and 'transmuted within contemporary political conditions' (2002: 252). In the same way, coverage of Beeston Hill, which focused on British Muslims, simplified the experience of the local Muslims within the particular context. Early negative reports, particularly in international publications which were accessed by local people via the internet, focused on the poverty and decay of the local area, and in some cases painted a picture of a religiously and ethnically divided community. The local Methodist Minister, who was outspoken in his critique of journalistic standards, expressed in a



radio interview his belief that portraying Beeston Hill as highly dysfunctional helped to make the bombings seem less threatening:

I felt some of the international reporters were more willing to ask some of the hard questions than some of the reporters from within the UK. I think some of the local reporters found the story too close to home, to be honest. I suppose readers didn't really want to open their newspapers or turn on their radios and hear that, actually, terrorists can come from a street like yours. So they were very anxious to paint Beeston as sort of somewhere that had problems that could be solved and then - you know - terrorism would go away (Bishop, 2005a).

Later reports were more balanced and highlighted the positive work undertaken in the community, and the positive relationships that have been built. Even reports based on information secured by covert means were often positive about the area (e.g. U. Khan, 2006).<sup>153</sup> However, the methods used were deeply upsetting to local people even if the report was positive.<sup>154</sup> This was expressed in a response, posted on the web, to the article by Urmee Khan which appeared in *The Observer* on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2006:

Under-cover journalism is justified when someone is trying to infiltrate a terror group or enter a war zone. Is it really justified, though, when the intention is just to give Observer readers a slice of ordinary life from an inner city suburb? The people who befriended Urmee have been betrayed by her. She has reported personal comments that were not intended for publication, not because it was in the public interest to do this but simply to round out her pen portrait of life in the Muslim community  
([http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/observer/archives/2006/06/17/what\\_is\\_muslim.html#more](http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/observer/archives/2006/06/17/what_is_muslim.html#more)).

Another newspaper report which was based on information gathered by covert journalists reported that the Imam at one of the three local mosques had expressed support for the bombers (Hussain, Calvert, & Walsh, 2006). This report was widely disbelieved locally. Many local Muslims dismissed the article, and other similar articles, as fabricated or manipulated. Some expressed frustration with the Imam for allowing himself to be misrepresented. In general there was a suspicion of the media which extended as far as involving the media in conspiracy theories that denied the bombings were carried out by the young men from Beeston Hill. This is not, however, to imply there was no support for the bombers, as will be explored below.

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<sup>153</sup> There was a considerable covert journalistic intrusion in Beeston Hill. Informally, I was told of new men appearing in the local mosques who were quickly asked to leave when they started asking strange questions or initiating what were considered to be inappropriate conversations.

<sup>154</sup> In the example of the article written by Urmee Khan in *The Observer* newspaper (2006), the fact that she posed as a University researcher was doubly difficult, as it created suspicion of genuine academics. One of the unfortunate consequences has been that those researchers who are not journalists and do not use covert means are nevertheless associated with these poor experiences, and it is difficult for anybody to conduct research.



The exemplar for the negative coverage, which was used frequently was an article which appeared in *The Boston Globe and Mail* (Saunders, 2005). As well as using a BNP spokesperson as a voice of the local community, the article painted a very bleak picture of Beeston Hill and Leeds in general. The extent to which this article is used as the exemplar of poor reporting about Beeston Hill is interesting. Firstly, it is from an American newspaper, so could plausibly be expected to have passed unnoticed by local residents, and secondly it is not as inflammatory as other reporting which occurred in British newspapers. However, the article was reported on by the anti-fascist newsletter *Searchlight*. The Respect party is active in Beeston Hill, and it seems likely that it was via this route that people became aware of the article.

An article by the journalist Shiv Malik, which appeared in *Prospect* magazine in June 2007, demonstrated that the reporting of Beeston had not yet finished (S. Malik, 2007). Despite the plausibility of many of Malik's conclusions, some of his allegations were inaccurate and his methods were highly dubious. A leading local community leader received significant damages, and a written apology on the basis of some of the inaccurate allegations that were made in the article, which also built an entire theory from data gathered in a variety of questionable ways, including paying for information. Again, it was the methods used as well as the content of the article that made it particularly concerning for residents of Beeston Hill.<sup>155</sup> That the magazine subsequently had to pay damages and apologise for the inaccuracies of the article demonstrates that

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<sup>155</sup> It is justifiable therefore to ask under what ethical criteria journalists work? Malik was restricted by the BBC's guidelines: 'I hadn't been given permission from the BBC to go undercover, everything I said had to be technically true, so I told him I was researching the Leeds drug problem for the BBC' (2007: 33). However, he clearly was not researching the Leeds drug problem, this being only a related aspect of his research. Arguably, therefore, this was a deliberately misleading statement in order to gain entry to an individual that Malik believed to be key to his investigation, who also happened to be the brother of one of the bombers and therefore still likely to be in a state of emotional turmoil. Equally, paying interviewees in a highly charged environment could arguably encourage sensationalist retellings of events in order to secure future payments for further information. The limited contextualisation of comments, and the interpretations used are also channelled towards a singular outcome. For instance, the author interprets a Muslim community worker's denial of permission for his employees to be interviewed to be an act of intimidation, and deliberate control of information. The alternative interpretation, that the community worker was acting to protect an organisation which had received substantial negative reporting, is not seriously countenanced in the article. In an academic setting, the use of this style and of these techniques would be considered ethically unacceptable and would also render the conclusions questionable.



the article not only appeared to have crossed a line but had actually crossed a line in what was acceptable.<sup>156</sup>

Media representations of Beeston Hill and the response of local people to the media in the aftermath of the 2005 London bombings, clearly provide insights into a variety of issues. Firstly, as we have seen, there are issues concerning the ethics of journalists, the extent to which local people mistrusted them, and also the varying degrees of accuracy that were present in media representations. Themes such as religion, ethnicity and poverty were used by some parts of the media to define and describe the local community as a 'problem'. However, the positive voices that were heard in the media also demonstrate a degree of local dominance in articulations of the local community. Local leaders sought to prevent possible tensions by emphasising an image of the community as cohesive and mutually supportive. The role of leaders and existing networks in responding to the aftermath of the bombings provided a cohesive, positive articulation of community identity, as will be explored below in section 7.4. This was in contrast to the demotic articulation of community identity which was provided by some of the young people of Beeston Hill.

### *7.3. Young People*

Many local people were unhappy with the way in which some journalists uncritically accepted the comments of young men who were to be found playing football or cricket, or simply 'hanging around', in Cross Flatts Park. The 'Young Men in the Park' became a key voice in media representations of the local community. South Asian Muslim young men in particular were viewed as having a unique insight not only because of their similar backgrounds to the men who carried out the bombings, but also because these men had been actively involved in youth work in the area. South Asian Muslim

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<sup>156</sup> Andrew Belsey, in an article on journalism and ethics, acknowledges the problematic image that the public have of journalists:

'Journalists are regarded in much the same way as politicians, as disreputable, untrustworthy and dishonest, pushing a personal or sectional interest rather than the facts of the case. If people are told that the essence of journalism is truth-telling, they will react with some scepticism or derision. If they are told that the practice of journalism is founded on ethical principles they will either laugh or, if they are prepared to take the matter seriously, point out that the typical tabloid story is trivial, scurrilous or invented' (1998: 1).

However, he argues that there is a practice of ethical journalism 'embodied' in codes of practice such as that of the Press Complaints Commission, and exemplified by individuals such as the journalist Martin Bell, who famously became the MP for Tatton (1998: 8). This high moral standard in journalism was not evident for the people of Beeston Hill, and as Belsey acknowledges 'industrial journalism is largely an ethics-free zone' (1998: 8).



young men were filmed arguing that they could understand why the bombings happened, and in some cases expressing support for what the bombers had done. They were willing to discuss the bombings as consequences of the Iraq war, or the Israel-Palestine conflict, and to tap into the rhetoric of international attacks on Islam. They were also willing to discuss the poverty of the local area, and to articulate local conflict along the lines of race. In general, the young men in the park illustrated the sense of neglect that is apparent around the young and disengaged whatever their ethnic or religious background.

Although many of the South Asian young men were engaged in unIslamic activities, and were neither the type of young men who carried out the bombings, nor had extensive contact with them, they nevertheless told an important part of the story of Beeston Hill. However, there are three reasons why the local community and an outside observer can question both the reporting and the content of the young men's remarks. Firstly, there were several examples of young men purposefully misinforming and misleading the reporters, both for their own amusement and in some cases as a way of harassing neighbours and others. I was told how one Polish news team appeared on a bemused woman's doorstep demanding to see the bomb factory in the attic. These types of actions could be simplistically interpreted as pranks, but are also open to other interpretations, and I think particularly to the interpretation that these pranks are an effort by these young people to reassert control over their environment. Claire Alexander, in her study of 'The Asian Gang' also reported this type of activity. She notes how the media coverage of violent incidents involving young Asian men focused on, 'anonymous teenage boys with covered faces and macho poses recounting tales of former victories and future challenges' (2000: 12). She also observed how a Home Office researcher was duped into recording fantastical tales because of, 'the high spirits of young men with an all-to-clear understanding of their function as folk devil and a talent for caricature' (2000: 28- 29). The young men in Beeston were following a similar pattern in inventing bomb factories and other stories for journalists seeking a good story.

A second reason to question the responses of the young men was that it was rumoured that they had been paid or encouraged by journalists to make inflammatory comments. Malik, in the aforementioned article clearly states that he paid for information. Although it was not possible for me to ask these young men if they felt they had been manipulated

by journalists, it is widely held that these young men were often led into making negative comments and discussing international affairs by the journalists, rather than the journalists simply uncovering a discourse that was already in operation. Alongside the desire to live up to the 'folk devil' image, the likelihood of media manipulation of impressionable young people makes it relatively easy to question the validity of the statements reported.

The third reason why the accounts from the young men in the park can be called into question is the omission from early media accounts of the major conflicts in the area, between young South Asian and Traveller (Roma) gangs, and between young South Asian and Black gangs. This is a conflict that had resulted in the murder of black teenager Tyrone Clark and led to considerable soul searching and community work, yet was not mentioned in otherwise quite detailed accounts of the problems of the local area from these young men. It was only a year later that this angle was being explored in media coverage of Beeston Hill. This seems like a strange omission. It is possible that this demonstrates an underlying sense that the gang problems in the area were unrelated to the motivations of the bombers, or that avoiding talking about this was a further, unconscious, way of defending the area. It is also possible that, although the gang problems in the area are often associated in the media with race, the gang divisions are as much geographical, by street for instance, than necessarily related to race. The young people themselves may not therefore see gangs as primarily racially identified. Alexander argues that media and other representations of 'The Asian Gang' failed to take account of the fact that those identified as gang members often did not see themselves as such, and that there was a variety of different associations involved in friendship and other groups. However, without access to these young people myself it is impossible to do more than suggest that the experience of young men in Beeston Hill is similar to that Alexander observed in London. It is also not possible to do more than raise possibilities concerning motivation and action in general for the way the young men depicted the area. Those people with whom I was in contact, from both the local South Asian and white population, demonstrated considerable impatience with the young men in the park. This is part of a much broader picture of intergenerational tension which has been discussed in academic as well as public policy discourses (for example, Cattle, 2001; Lewis, 2007). The concern among local residents with the disaffection of young people was of long standing, and a broad range of activities and



initiatives in the area had been focused on re-engaging young people and tackling the racial element in local gangs.<sup>157</sup>

For the people of Beeston Hill, the events following the London bombings of 2005 were potentially deeply divisive. Strident talk from South Asian young men, and inflammatory reporting might have caused a great degree of tension. Instead, there was a sense of common concern about the disengagement of young people, and a uniting against the shared enemy of the media. As demonstrated above, this was not effected by outsiders but emerged from within the neighbourhood and particularly from local leaders. The community which was being defended was defined by locality and shared concerns but also by local leaderships. The importance of leadership from within the community, and an ability to fall back on established patterns of contact, was vital in presenting a cohesive community to the outside world, and reinforcing that sense of community locally.

#### *7.4. Local Leadership*

As will be seen in chapter eight, leadership is significant in how local groups respond to national policies. In the context of the nature and articulation of community, who is seen as a leader, and who takes leadership roles, is dependent on who wishes to be led, who is willing to respect leadership, and how a community organises around these questions. In Beeston Hill in the aftermath of 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005, it was people with an overtly religious identity who were the most visible community leaders. A local atheist, whose critique of leadership was explored in the previous chapter, noted that:

After 7/7 both the police and the council, they looked for community leaders in Beeston and they went to the religious people which, they should be included but they went exclusively to them. And partly maybe it's because there aren't structures for other people to be recognised as leaders (Interviewee J, March 2006).

However, for many local people this reliance on religious people was an acceptable form of leadership. It is also important to note that it was only an officially recognised

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<sup>157</sup> However, as Hussein points out, it is possible that efforts by Muslims to engage with the state increase the disengagement of the young:

'...in the process of observing the reactions to 9/11, the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, while feeling that there is a double standard at play when dealing with the Muslim world, it is especially young Muslims who feel more isolated and alienated. They become further distanced by observing that fellow Muslims want to deal with the establishment that has betrayed them, and thus they turn to radical alternatives outside the 'system' of both the State and the traditional structures of the Muslim community' (2004: 126- 127).

leadership, by virtue of religious office, on the part of the Christian leaders. Muslim community spokespersons and leaders were community workers and others with standing in the community rather than religious leaders. This included the local councillor who was a Muslim of South Asian heritage. Although an Imam did attend the two minute silence, and speak afterwards, this was a relatively rare appearance by a local Imam in the sphere outside the Mosque. Whereas many Christians commented throughout my research that they did not know the local Imams, many of the local Muslims knew who the Anglican Vicar and Methodist Minister were. The importance of religious identity, and leadership, in Beeston Hill was clear in the first press release from the area on 12<sup>th</sup> July:

In response to the police raids in Beeston and Holbeck today, and the Government's call for a 2 minute silence to be observed on Thursday to remember the victims of the London bombings last week, Muslim, Sikh and Christian community leaders are inviting members of all the communities in Beeston and Beeston Hill to come together at the Hamara Centre at 12 o'clock as a visible sign of our shared resolution to oppose the use of terrorism and of our refusal to be divided by it (Bishop & Malik, 2005).

This earliest response was based around the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project, with the two contact people being the project leaders, and Faith Together in Leeds 11 receiving a specific mention. Clearly, in Beeston Hill, the important community roles of people with a religious background provided a double level of community 'buy-in'. Leadership responsibilities were taken by those who identified themselves via their religion, but who had standing in the community through their community work. This was particularly important post 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 because of the religious dimension to the motivations of the bombers. Although we have seen in an earlier chapter that there was concern from non-religious people about the importance that religious leaders were given locally, it is unsurprising that in a religiously charged situation those with religious views would both be keen to be heard, but also be particularly sought as providing a relevant perspective on the situation.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Local authority bodies also took a part in leadership though not as visibly as individuals who identified with religion. Meetings to decide on how to commemorate the anniversary of the bombings, the community open forum meetings, and other events were promoted or organised by the Neighbourhood Renewal Team. However, possibly wisely, it was people who were already seen to have local leadership roles who became the 'face' of the activity. This did not exclude people of no religion. The community open forums were both chaired by people who are seen as community leaders but are not linked to a religious community.



As has been demonstrated, in Beeston Hill in the latter half of 2005 there was anxiety about what outsiders might 'do' to the community, as well as a vigorous defence of the area, its people and its institutions. For many, the pressure on the area was seen as actively bringing people together rather than creating divisions, for example one older South Asian heritage Muslim man commented that: 'since 7/7 the whole community came together' (Hamara Men's Group, June 2006). A younger Muslim woman noted that although there were tensions, especially between young people, and around a gang culture, this had 'put a lot of pressure on us to make everything not just look OK, but for it to be OK within the community' (Interviewee M, June 2006).<sup>159</sup> Community leaders were active in presenting an image of Beeston as a cohesive community, and although they were very aware of the pressure that local Muslims felt themselves to be under, there was nevertheless considerable pride in the active response to social and economic need in Beeston Hill, both before and after the bombings.

The emphasis in press interviews and press releases was on 'our refusal to be divided by it' (Beeston Press Release following bombings), thus creating a common enemy against which to unite people:

'Beeston is together,' said Muserat Sujawal, one of the Trustees of Hamara, speaking after a meeting with Neil Bishop from Trinity Methodist Church and Bob Shaw from Holy Spirit C of E, two of the local Christian ministers who serve the Faith Together in Leeds 11 organisation. 'We strongly believe there is a sense of community cohesion across Beeston, and the events of last week have only made this stronger,' she said (Sujawal & Shaw, 2005).

This assertion of the positive and cohesive nature of the Beeston community was also commented on by the local Anglican vicar:

Just as bad things happen to good individuals, so also bad things happen to good communities. The truth is that Beeston Hill is a good place to live. It is full of human warmth, friendship and neighbourliness. It has produced examples of community action at its best. Most of the reporters who arrived in Leeds 11 after the identity of the 7th July bombers became known were looking for things they did not find. The truth about this part of Leeds is the greatest sign of hope for us (Shaw, 2005).

The activities which were organised after 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 were aimed at both presenting Beeston as a cohesive community, but also building the sense of cohesion. However, the young men in the park were least likely to take part in these activities, and it has

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<sup>159</sup> As has been repeatedly noted, the experience of young people in Beeston, particularly those exhibiting signs of disaffection, is an area most in need of further work, but during the period of my fieldwork it did not become possible to speak to young people.



already been noted that they were presenting a different picture of Beeston to reporters. It would be a mistake to assume that either of these pictures were the more accurate. As was noted by many members of the Muslim community, and local community workers, the difficulty was how to engage those young people in the positive work in the area:

It was a reminder that actually there are some people in the community who do feel disconnected from everybody else and it gives us an extra sense of urgency, in for instance reaching out to try and work with young people and with children as well (Bishop, 2005b).

There was a general awareness among those with leadership roles, not only of the problems of disaffection among young people, but also of the related extent to which young people were more likely to express extreme views. A few Muslims that I spoke to were willing to admit informally that extremist views were circulating among a very few young Muslim people, but the assumption was that this was rhetoric and youthful experimentation. Indeed, when it was seen to have gone too far, young people had been expelled from the local mosques. Local men who were considered to have stirred up such feelings were arrested as part of the police investigation, but released without charge. This would seem to support a view that there was a difference between rhetorical, youthful experimentation and criminal behaviour. In an email from a local Christian leader, he commented that:

I have a hunch that some of the young people quoted by the *Sunday Times* as having similar views [in support of the bombers] probably would be quite happy to say all kinds of provocative things to what they thought was an appropriate and sympathetic audience. The interesting thing is that, while similar extremist views have always been bandied round Beeston, the bombers themselves kept a very low profile and gave no hint of what they were going to do (Interviewee N, email B March 2006).

Although, therefore, the young men in the park were presenting to journalists a less cohesive picture of Beeston Hill than the community leaders and other residents, it would be inaccurate to assume this was the whole of the picture. Although undoubtedly displaying their own disaffection with local activities to promote cohesion, other local residents were both proud of and active in these activities. The difference between these two versions of community demonstrates the contested and problematic nature of representations of a local area. Although both the locally-dominant and the demotic voices were representing a version of the community of Beeston Hill, neither was articulating, or indeed able to articulate, the whole picture.



Beeston Hill in late 2005 was a community which had exhibited both signs of tension and signs of cohesion. However, the most visible tensions were between insiders and outsiders and young people and elders, rather than between South Asians and whites, or Muslims and Christians. The cohesion was presented and reinforced by community leaders who had a degree of respect locally and knowledge of the people and locality which could be called on. Vital to this effort were the established contacts, particularly around the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project, which were quickly drawn on in early July 2005.

### *7.5. The Importance of Established Contacts*

Immediately following raids on properties in Beeston Hill on 12<sup>th</sup> July the leaders of the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project were able to distribute a press release and within two days organise a well-attended two minute silence. Numbering no more than ten key figures, this network included local Christian ministers, local Muslim community workers, and local community activists.<sup>160</sup> Although this network was relatively elite, including as it did many of those who were considered community leaders, it nevertheless related directly to a very broad constituency. Not only could the network call on those who were users of the community centres, it also called on family and social ties which drew a considerable proportion of local residents into the circle of influence. Activities such as the community walk to the city centre, and the trip to London to sign books of condolence were organised with minimum bureaucracy because established personal links could be called upon. A young, local, female, Muslim community activist noted:

I think there was some stuff that I did, there was a lot of stuff that we did around 7/7 when we were kind of going off to London, there was a great deal of sort of ringing each other and kind of community feeling and stuff which was really nice (Interviewee M, June 2006).

The Anglican vicar, in an article about the area, supported this interpretation of events and stressed the relationship between co-operation, contact and friendship:

Such community-based cooperation has led to more inter-faith contacts and friendships and a sense of common purpose in Beeston Hill that has strengthened us to face the aftermath of 7<sup>th</sup> July (Shaw, 2005).

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<sup>160</sup> The distinction here between 'worker' and 'activist' is used to separate those who were paid to have a leadership role in the community, and those who did so on a voluntary basis. There is, however, a considerable overlap between these two categories, as several of the community workers were employed because they were activists, and would probably have been involved in the network whether employed or not.

As this community feeling tended to be focused among people associated with the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project, it was potentially very divisive when the focus of the police investigation turned to the Hamara centre itself. After initial television interviews given in the grounds of the Hamara centre, and by Hamara centre staff, which gave a positive image of the area, it was particularly notable when the emphasis changed from seeing Hamara as a good news story to a potential bad news story. Again, the strength of the network was called upon to support the Hamara centre:

Local residents and community groups of all faiths and none are uniting together in Beeston around the Faith Together in Leeds 11 organisation, which includes the Hamara organisation and other local Muslim organisations, as well as Trinity Methodist Church and Holy Spirit C of E Church, following the unfair publicity which Hamara has attracted in the last few days (Sujawal & Shaw, 2005).

As will be seen in the following chapter, these strong local links and contacts are what the government hope to encourage through supporting inter-faith initiatives. Certainly, the established network of relationships based around the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project was a significant resource to be called upon and contributed significantly to the lack of tension in the area. However, this was not a network which had been externally and artificially created. Although having resulted in the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project, and therefore linked to the work of these centres, the network of contacts was neither funded nor supported by any governmental policy. Indeed, dealing with the aftermath of 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 was a considerable diversion for some people from their day to day work:

People always ask me this that or the other about the operational side [of Building Blocks] and I haven't a clue; I've only been involved in the strategic side for quite a while. And increasingly its things like how we respond to 7<sup>th</sup> July and so on, which whilst worth considering, they don't actually affect the running of the project and if anything they are a distraction. So this is what I keep saying to journalists. They keep saying "well can we see you next Wednesday?" and I say "If you don't come Tuesday morning I can't see you, I've got a job to do" (Interviewee N, June 2006).

Instead the network was an informal, voluntary grouping of local people which had developed over a number of years, because of very practical need and based on good inter-personal relationships. Interestingly, this network appears to follow the pattern articulated by Werbner (1991a) in the development of an urban protest movement: localised associative empowerment, ideological convergence and mobilisation. However, whereas Werbner identifies specific 'black and ethnic' leaderships, the Faith Together in Leeds 11 network exists, self-consciously, across religious and ethnic



divides. At the stage of localised associative empowerment, therefore, the key element was shared activism in the local area, rather than shared ethnic or religious identity. Ideological convergence occurred around a general commitment to community cohesion, rather than securing rights or representation for a minority group. Mobilisation was then experienced in response to the specific local threat of tension following the London bombings. Unlike the groupings Werbner identifies, the Faith Together in Leeds 11 network exists across boundaries and calls on the specific constituencies of individuals. Although these individuals are all what Werbner would describe as ‘politically self-conscious, elite members of their communities’ and ‘as such, they all share greater involvement and knowledge of wider society’ (1991a, 21), they nevertheless draw on a significant constituency which extends beyond the often noted divisions of ethnicity and religion. Where this network failed was in its inability to access the young and disengaged. This is a challenge which exists much more widely than this particular situation.

#### *7.6. Conclusion: The Myth and Reality of Community*

Despite a considerable amount of fear and suspicion, Beeston Hill was not enormously damaged by the aftermath of the London bombings of 2005. A network of established local contacts, including religious leaders, community workers and local politicians, was drawn upon to effectively present and support the area. Outsiders seeking to assist the area appeared to have little impact on how local people responded, and in some cases were seen as simply taking an opportunity to get a piece of the media spotlight. Outsiders who were seen to have a negative agenda concerning the area, particularly the media, provided a symbolic enemy against which people united.

Central to the response to the aftermath of the bombings was an initiative that had an emphasis on religious identity and diversity:

We were appalled that some people in our community could have such a radically different vision of what God wants. But the 7th of July didn't weaken our partnership, it strengthened our resolve to go on working together. In the midst of a huge media circus, which descended on Beeston Hill looking for signs of hatred and antipathy between Muslims and Christians, between people from South Asia and their White neighbours, Faith Together in Leeds 11 stood as a visible sign – for those who wanted to see – not of integration, not of compromising our different cultures and beliefs, but of sharing and collaborating, of friendship and harmony (Bishop, 2006).

The ability of this network, and the associated social capital, to withstand such an attack demonstrates both the strength of the links, and the rootedness of the network in the people who live in the locality, and the local community which is created and recreated in different arenas for different needs.

Just as personal identity is multiple, varied and overlapping so too community boundaries are pliable, and responsive to need and situation. The community of Beeston Hill was defined in terms of religion, ethnicity, social economic status or locality depending on the situation in which the term community was used. Importantly after the London bombings, the community of Beeston Hill was something to be defended against those who were considered to be outsiders. Indeed, to an extent the community came into existence in terms of what it was not, rather than what it was. This raises questions about dominant discourses of community cohesion and inter-faith theology. Whereas governmental and policy discourses use the rhetoric of localism, networks and personal relationships to tap into and resource the nebulous community, the experience on the ground is that funding does not necessarily support these outcomes, and that individuals relate to different senses of community in different situations: inter-faith theology on the other hand plays very little role in this local experience and activity of community representation, whilst having a significant role in how religions' present themselves to the political discourse. How personal identity and community are used and manipulated, how they relate to state discourses, and how the state relates to religion and inter-faith dialogue is therefore an important area. The next chapter will therefore provide a commentary on the role of, awareness about, and manipulation of state discourses among the people of Beeston Hill.



## Chapter 8: Beeston Hill and the State

In chapter three an overview was provided of some of the main features of 'religion in the public square' and the relationship between the religions in the UK and the state. The historical relationship between the state and religion, the growth of religious diversity and secularism were identified, as were issues around the role of the Church of England in public life. Using key recent moments, the direction and nature of the relationship between religion and the state was illustrated. In this chapter the implications of this context for local people and projects is explored. Drawing on interview data and other findings it is possible to identify the ways in which policy agendas intentionally and unintentionally influence the local experience of co-working between religions and between religions and the state. Key issues are found to be about representation and funding.

For people in religiously diverse neighbourhoods, particularly in areas of social and economic disadvantage, the state's agenda regarding religion is significant. The role of faith-based organisations in providing welfare support, the relative significance of different religions, and the nature of representation and leadership, are all themes which have more than theoretical significance. Even such an apparently peripheral issue as the use of language can be of importance when that language is contested and unclear.

### *8.1. The Uses of Language*

In the context of local Muslim-Christian relations, the dominant language used in policy documents and other areas of the state machinery can seem very distant. However, there is an extent to which the language used influences the local experience. For instance, pervading this entire thesis has been the uncomfortable use of words such as 'faith', 'faith-based organisation' and 'faith community' as opposed to 'religion'. The language which is used in the public square is significant. In the same way that community and identity have been demonstrated to be varied and contested, so too the use of words such as 'faith' and 'religion' are complex and contested. In general, there has been a shift towards the use of 'faith' and away from 'religion' in public discourse and policy documents. In chapter three it was noted that as early as 1985 the language of 'faith communities' as opposed to 'religion' was used in the *Faith in the City* report (Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, 1985). This shift from 'religion' to 'faith' has been challenged for a variety of reasons. Although it is the

dominant language in the field, and as such has been adopted here, it is a choice of words that has been critiqued both in the literature and 'on the ground'. Smith notes that the use of phrases such as 'faith-based organisations' unselfconsciously reflects the language of the voluntary and community sector, and thus reinforce the sense of 'faith' being just one part of this larger third sector (2004: 194). Others note that the use of language such as 'faith community' can seem to imply ethnic minority community rather than having any specific religious meaning (Farnell et al., 2003: 5). Two of the national figures interviewed in the course of fieldwork felt the shift from 'religion' to 'faith' was not a considered shift in language, but instead possibly part of a general secularising discourse: neither felt it was a helpful use of words, as it tended to encourage homogeneity and did not deal with inter- and intra-religious diversity. Both argued it was important for organisations and groups to use the words they consider most appropriate, instead of adopting the dominant language. However, both noted that it was the language the churches had adopted and was therefore becoming mainstream.

In Beeston Hill 'faith' and 'community' were used relatively interchangeably and without any particular reflection. As a result of the dominance of Islam and Christianity as local religions, many people spoke specifically about these rather than using more general terms. 'Religion' tended to be used in a more specific way to mean 'the religion which a person follows', whereas 'faith' was used in popular discourse to refer to an individual's level of commitment. However, those people who were involved in the policy agendas, for instance through applying for grants, were more likely to use terminology such as 'faith-based'. As we shall see below, and as has already been noted above, there can be a sense in which 'faith community' is short hand for 'ethnic minority community'. Where 'faith-based organisations' are seen as key partners in accessing the hard to reach, as we shall see below, this confusion may become even more significant.

The term 'community' which was discussed in chapter seven is also important in both the language of the dominant discourse, and the nature of the demotic experience. In policy and other official documents such as the *Working Together* guidance (Faith Communities Unit, 2004), in state bodies such as the Faith Communities Unit, and even in funding schemes such as the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund, 'community' is used alongside 'faith' to signify some form of unitary whole. As was demonstrated in chapter seven, 'community' is not a stable, single unit and is instead



differently constructed in different situations. This lack of recognition of the complexity and possible misrepresentation in the term 'community' is not challenged in official documents. At a local level this can influence how people relate to one another and to those perceived as 'outside'. The language of policy expects and encourages alliances and uniformity which may not be present at a local level. Hence, the diversity of the Muslim or Christian 'community', even in a neighbourhood as small as Beeston Hill, is lost in the need to affirm a single identity which is recognisable to 'policy-speak'.

As well as the shift from 'religion' to 'faith' and the under-nuanced use of 'community', there is also an issue around the use of 'inter-faith dialogue' in governmental language. The 2007 consultation document *Face-to-Face and Side-by-Side* links the community cohesion agenda and the building of social capital, with inter-faith dialogue (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007).<sup>161</sup> The consultation defines inter-faith activity as consisting of dialogue (face-to-face) and social action (side-by-side). However, the consultation document is entirely concerned with outcomes for communities and policy agendas, and at no point refers to the theological underpinning for inter-faith dialogue, the Christian and pluralist overtones and the problematic history of the inter-faith movement, for instance as regards mission. This implies that either this background has ceased to be significant, or has remained unconsidered. It is possible that the use of the phrase 'inter-faith dialogue' in government consultation exercises and reports has in itself sterilised the term of previously problematic overtones. Certainly, the theological and personal implications of working alongside or being in meaningful contact with others are not questioned in the consultation document.<sup>162</sup>

It is important to remain aware of the problematic use of language when analysing the key issues in how dominant policy agendas affected Beeston Hill during the period of my fieldwork. The problematic nature of the language indicates an underlying difficulty

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<sup>161</sup> The consultation report will be published in autumn 2008.

<sup>162</sup> The consultation document describes contact as meaningful when 'conversations go beyond surface friendliness; in which people exchange personal information or talk about each other's differences and identities; people share a common goal or share an interest; contact is sustained long term' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007: 14). For people in Beeston Hill the most meaningful contact was often simply being comfortable saying 'hello' to someone in the street. This issue of what constitutes 'meaningful' dialogue will be returned to in the final chapter.

with defining and identifying religion in the lived reality of a religiously diverse neighbourhood.<sup>163</sup>

### *8.2. The Relationship between Religion and the State in Beeston Hill*

Partnership working between religions and the state is not based on equality, either locally or nationally. The local, regional and national state apparatus and policy framework has significant power in all community and voluntary sector settings. Faith-based organisations, which are generally defined as organisations with a distinctive religious ethos, are relative newcomers in the realm of partnership working. They are disadvantaged by their non-uniform structures, modes of working and levels of professionalisation. Problems in partnership working concentrate around representation, objectives, and a lack of the professional class devoted to this work, which is found in the rest of the community and voluntary sector. For the state however, faith-based organisations are seen as key partners because of their access to otherwise hard to reach communities, the social capital they can call on and contribute to (Furbey, Dinham, Farnell, Finneron, & Wilkinson, 2006), and their resources, such as buildings (Farnell et al., 2003) and volunteers (Lukka, Locke, & Soteri-Procter, 2003).<sup>164</sup> For faith-based organisations partnership working with the state is an important opportunity to secure funding to extend and develop the work they contribute to their local community. In the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project, many of these issues are visible.

In many disadvantaged local communities and neighbourhoods it is the religious leaders and structures which have stayed, in the case of Christianity, or arrived, in the case of other religions, when many other public amenities, structures and support have left. Often under very difficult conditions, vicars and other ministers of religion have been trying to fill the gaps left by the desertion of local communities (Vincent, 2003). In Beeston Hill this is not as marked as in other areas. The Methodist church in particular has been proactive in supporting the local community. However, it is not alone in this. As well as public sector bodies and agencies such as Sure Start and the Neighbourhood Renewal Team, organisations such as the South Leeds Elderly and Community Group,

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<sup>163</sup> It has already been shown in chapter two that this difficulty is also important in the theoretical discourse of religious studies.

<sup>164</sup> The specific social capital that religions can draw on has been characterised as 'faithful capital' (Commission on Urban Life and Faith, 2006a). However, this is not a term which has been popularly adopted.



with a Muslim ethos, have been operating in the area for some time.<sup>165</sup> Secular groups such as Vera Media and the Asha centre have also contributed to the local community over many years. However, as was discussed in chapter four, the social and economic needs of the residents of Beeston Hill are still significant.

In this context, one of the principal drivers for the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project is the desire to serve local people who may not otherwise have access to provision. When discussing the importance of the two community centres working together one non-religious community activist commented that:

...we can be a key player in influencing what happens locally and we can hopefully provide an integrated service to local people. So for all those reasons it makes every sense in the world for us to operate quite closely together and not to just drift off and go our own way... For local people they want high quality low cost day care or crèche provision and they probably don't care who provides it (Interviewee G, March 2005).

What makes the project particularly strong for this activist is that it is locally based with a significant number of those involved being local residents. Although she does not consider religion itself to be important to the project, the reach of the project among the people of the neighbourhood is. Much of this reach is linked to religion: either through religious leaders, or the provision of faith-sensitive services. Religion therefore becomes the route via which those who are hard to reach because of language or culture are accessed. The close perceived, and often actual, link between ethnicity and religion is evident in this situation.

A Muslim project leader noted the importance of serving the needs of the local community:

...one of the central aspects in terms of developing this was to try to bridge a void in service provision that currently exists, we were aware that we could fill that through this particular resource here and then I mean we're on our way with that in the sense that you know there are negotiations being undertaken with people like the primary care trust and social services. So there's a lot of services in the pipeline, so that's key (Interviewee H, June 2004).

Bodies such as the primary care trust and social services are principally interested in projects such as Faith Together in Leeds 11, and particularly the Hamara centre, because of the ability of these centres to access the South Asian community which they

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<sup>165</sup> SLECG is the major partner in the Hamara project and has been principally orientated towards serving the needs of local South Asian elders.

otherwise find it hard to serve. Two health care concerns in particular, diet and mental health, have been of significance in the Hamara centre. The presence of specialist mental health drop-ins, events promoting healthy eating or good mental health and courses teaching cooking skills have all been important dimensions to the activities at Hamara. The local rootedness of the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project, and the image of Hamara as a ‘safe space’ for Muslim women, as described in chapter four, is vital in the provision of these services.

However, funding bodies displayed a lack of awareness of the needs and abilities of small, local groups; particularly as they aspire to fund those with access to hard to reach communities, but require these groups to achieve national dissemination of their practice:

...the government said it was worth working with faith-based organisations because they were local and rooted in the community... So ... another big bug bear is that every fund you care to name, and the Parenting Fund would be a case in point... there’s one of the questions always says how are you going to be able to publicise your good practice in your project at the national level? Or even if the question doesn’t say that the notes to the question will say that what they’re really looking for is the widest possible dissemination of good practice ... basically therefore all the Parenting Fund money went to organisations that are nationally based and one of them was a faith-based organisation. Local grassroots faith-based organisations didn’t get a look in (Interviewee N, November 2004).

Clearly, the view ‘from the ground’ is that there is problem with a policy agenda which wishes to capitalise on the ability of small, local projects but expects more from these projects than they are able to deliver, and thus disadvantages them in the funding process.<sup>166</sup>

A further problem for local projects concerning policy agendas is the degree to which these agendas change. The promotion of community cohesion was seen as intrinsic to the project by many of the respondents. For example, Interviewee G commented that the continued working together of the two centres was: ‘important on a broadly political sense in that community cohesion is very important’ (March 2005). Interviewee L recognised the significance of this agenda in the work of the Hamara centre:

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<sup>166</sup> The Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund was launched in 2005 to address some of the capacity issues, of which this may be one, that faith-based organisations are perceived to have. Faith Together in Leeds 11 was already operational when this funding was introduced. An application to this fund from the project was not successful.



We have a community café which also brings in different communities together. This is part of our community cohesion strategy, Faith Together in Leeds 11 was set up to bring community together and they are coming together (June 2006).

Interviewee H indicated how important the concept of community cohesion is to the Faith Together project:

...the underlying ethos of Faith Together in Leeds 11 as a whole has been to sort of utilise the buildings to enhance those community relations you know, and I mean I know it's a buzz word at a moment but the community cohesion aspect (June 2004).

Almost incidentally, interviewee H makes an important observation in noting that community cohesion is 'a buzz word'. It is important to be aware of the transient nature of many of the policies which impact on a small local project such as Faith Together. In the course of observations at the centre there was a shift from 'urban regeneration' to 'community cohesion' to 'social enterprise'. This does not necessarily indicate any change in government policy; indeed most of these policy themes are mutually implicated. However, it does demonstrate the way in which policy agendas are understood at a neighbourhood level: not necessarily as part of a whole. The emphasis was dominated to a considerable extent by the funding streams which were affecting the centres at any one time.

The centre manager at Building Blocks was acutely aware of the current 'buzz word' as Building Blocks was particularly affected by what was experienced as a change in culture:

The 'buzz word' is social enterprise, it was community cohesion, and we were doing that, but there's no funding. There doesn't seem to be a policy that's sustainable. There was a meeting about ... funding it's all about training and new jobs (Interviewee W, February 2005).

For Building Blocks, an initial dependence on grant funding for work to satisfy community cohesion and urban regeneration needs was replaced by a need to shift towards a social enterprise, with a more economic orientation. Although this was perhaps not the intention of the policy shift, it is nonetheless the way it was experienced at the local level. Indeed, the way in which funding was allocated seemed to run contrary to the overall objectives of the funding streams. For instance, one project leader noted the way in which funding streams encouraged the two community centres to present themselves as separate entities, thus undermining the cohesive dimension of the Faith Together project:



You could always present them as a coherent whole but the trouble is there are times when it is easier to get funding by not doing that. I mean one of the problems with seeing it as a coherent whole, the project is very complicated to understand so the problem that Hamara have when they try to take that line, and they've done a bid for the Community Fund and they included stuff because they thought it would be helpful about how we're working in partnership and so on. The Community Fund then said "well it all seems not very clear management process" ... in the end they did apologise for that .... Because the trouble is the more complicated you make a project the harder it is for other people to understand it. ... I mean as someone was saying to me about working ecumenically, "nothing in partnership working is easy" when people say "well we want to be in partnership" ... they're not in the real world are they? So there is therefore a strong temptation to present the two projects as almost kind of separate to say "oh by the way we do have a joint management committee but this is really an independent project with its own integrity and stuff" because its much easier when putting in for funding... which is a shame really because again of this whole problem of how you fund a project like this drives wedges into encouraging cohesion (Interviewee N, November 2004).

These comments about the policy agendas demonstrate an underlying concern with accessing funding. Indeed, the policy agendas would be unlikely to have any bearing on the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project if they did not come with funding attached. Many of these concerns, about transient policy agendas and unrealistic expectations of small organisations would apply to any small community and voluntary sector organisation. The Asha centre in Beeston Hill, for example, experiences similar difficulties. However, specific problems arise for faith-based organisations because of their relatively late arrival in the arena of public funding for community work. How, therefore, organisations like Faith Together in Leeds 11 represent themselves, and what compromises they are prepared to make in order to 'get at the money' are instructive about how the demotic experience of need relates to the dominant discourse of provision.

One local activist demonstrated the need for small organisations to think pragmatically about accessing funding streams:

I went to early meetings around SRB4 back in 1997, because of the desire to get in on the funding because with previous SRB rounds we hadn't got in at the ground floor. So we were dependent on people coming to us and saying 'I've got some SRB4 funding can you do this and that?' So we wanted to get integrally involved and so we went to one meeting that was in this area and spoke about videos with everyone else and after it [a local Christian leader] came up to me and said 'Would you be interested in being a member of a partnership ... Faith Together?' And so I said yes, definitely and that was how it began (Interviewee G, March 2005).



Although this individual is very committed to the vision of the Faith Together project, and has indeed been instrumental in its development and its continuity, her initial impetus for involvement was financial. Her enthusiasm for retaining the Faith Together ethos was also influenced by funding requirements; she argued that joint working was 'important for fundraising in that the larger your partnership the more likely you are to get funding'. This stands in contrast to the experience of Interviewee N highlighted earlier which led him to believe that it was not always best to work together. This may partly be because of her different experience, but also represents possibly an aspirational attitude to funding, in that she hopes the funding works in this way. Despite herself being non-religious, and her organisation being a secular partner in Faith Together, this activist did not see the 'faith' label as necessarily negative. As well as opening up the opportunity to apply for funds specifically for the faith sector, she also felt the 'faith' dimension 'lends respectability sometimes'. She wondered whether funding bodies were nervous of 'Asian face - fly by night' or the possibility of a 'hot bed of radicals' as well as organisations such as hers being seen as run by 'left wing social workers' (Interviewee G, March 2005). There has definitely been a development in how faith-based organisations are viewed during the fieldwork period. A Christian project worker echoed this opinion that religion lends credibility to a project:

It works 50% more in favour of group that says it has different faiths working together even if they don't have a faith themselves they believe people are going to have moral standards and be honest and not misuse the money (Interviewee W, February 2005).

Initial concerns that faith groups found it harder to get funding as they had to prove they were not going to promote religion, have given way to more positive perceptions where long Christian legacies of public service have been used as evidence for funding applications from other faiths.

Pragmatic concerns about accessing funding are constantly balanced by the vision that the project leaders' had, and have, for the centres. The tension between being vision-led and funding-led was noted by one project leader at Hamara:

...in terms of the design of the centre we ensured that we've retained as much space as possible for direct community use I mean as you're aware one of the difficulties in our sector is sustainability at a financial level and it would have been very easy for us to make offices in here to rent out that we'd have no problem renting out and that type of thing but to some extent we've had to fight our corner to ensure that it's a community resource not a commercial resource or centre (Interviewee H, June 2004).

In contrast, the Building Blocks centre did design rentable office space into the building, and indeed this has been a vital income stream. This indicates that from the beginning there was some awareness of the short term nature of funding, and the need to plan for other eventualities.

Several of the project leaders noted how the workload involved in securing funding took them away from the front-line of working with the local community:

...you get so caught up on a ... strategic development finances etc my little ... you forget the real aim of it which is the delivery to the community. It's so easy for it to happen. People come in you know like I had the healthcare commission in last week and I said I can't honestly answer all the questions because I don't have that direct involvement at a grassroots level anymore (Interviewee H, June 2004).

Another project worker was very conscious of the time commitment involved in simply attending the relevant meetings, and although could see the benefit of ensuring other providers were aware of the work of Building Blocks, was not convinced it was of benefit:

Well, I think it's hard to find time for the meetings, but you know I go to as many as I can. People know we're here. Local partnerships are good for people to know in term of service provision what we're doing. Useful so that we don't clash. In terms of funding I don't think there's a great deal of mileage. Quite a lot of running costs - just a matter of people knowing what we're doing really (Interviewee W, February 2005).

By 2006 however the shift to a social enterprise had changed this concern about 'attending the meetings':

...it's a positive in the sense that we, its made us more independent we don't have to run round responding to every council initiative because we've got to get on the gravy train, which has really annoyed the council because they got used to, you know if they call a meeting everybody goes to it, but there's just no point us going because there's nothing to offer. Really we just have to concentrate on the work in hand, going along to their sort of planning meetings for the area or whatever is just a distraction really, unless they've got something to offer (Interviewee N, June 2006).

Being released from the need to 'chase the money' had allowed the project to potentially move back towards being 'vision-led' rather than 'funding-led'. For faith-based organisations this need is particularly strong: operating as many of them do out of a very specific and strong ethos. The need to campaign on issues of justice is an important motivation for Christian organisations in the UK. As was shown in chapter six, Muslims also see work in the political and social sphere as deeply religiously



involving. This important vision and ethos of faith-based organisations is often driven by particular individuals who embody this ethos whether as religious leaders or as community workers. These individuals therefore have a difficult role in managing both local and state expectations and perceptions of them as religious leaders or representatives.

### *8.3. Leadership and Representation*

Issues surrounding leadership and representation are closely linked and similarly problematic in relationships between state-funding and faith-based organisations. The state machinery seeks representatives with whom to consult and leaders with whom to work. However, leaders and representatives are not as easy to identify in other religions as they are in the Church of England. Bodies such as the former Inner City Religious Council, or the present Faith Community Consultative Committee, depend for their legitimacy on individuals who can claim to speak for, if not represent, a faith community.

At a local level, the issue of who has the right to represent a religion can cause difficulties. A local Christian woman related an event that happened some time ago with a local Muslim businessman:

We had the same problems, you know about young people ... I used to chat to him quite a lot about different things, and then I said to him 'Oh, would you come and talk to a church meeting, and just tell 'em what you do... Say that you're having this problem with the young kids going off the rails, this kind of thing'. So he said he'd come. So we got all the churches together ... we all got there for the meeting, and in walks all these clerics, and Mr Thingy. The clerics walked up to the front and he's sat here in the audience. And I'm thinking what's going on here? And they took it to be a sort of promoting Islam meeting. And they were from the University so they knew exactly what they were saying, and they started going on about Islam, and saying well, you know, you believe in three Gods, and we only believe in one God and all this. And the people in the congregation were getting hot under the collar. It wasn't supposed to be this kind of meeting. And he, I wanted him to just get up and say how he lived his life basically. But he must have felt he wasn't qualified to you know to do it and he brought these people in who then used it ... They'd got their flowing robes ... and he's in his shop looking like Mr Smith, you know (Interviewee B, July 2004).

In this example it is clear that the local resident did not feel equipped to address a gathering, and so called on local religious authorities. In terms of how Christians and Muslims relate to one another this is important as clearly there has been a fear of misrepresenting or doing a disservice to one's religious tradition. However, this appears



to have changed in the ensuing ten years. Local and non-local Muslims who work at the Hamara centre demonstrate none of the qualms that may have been experienced by this businessman about representing their religion. As a result a local Muslim woman and a non-local Muslim man, who is a community worker in Beeston Hill, regularly came to give talks to the local group of Christians who were meeting in the hope of developing an inter-faith dialogue group. This demonstrates an extent to which Faith Together in Leeds 11 has empowered people to talk about religion, and fostered an environment in which this is acceptable. However, this local informal representation is quite different to that expected and required by committees and other consultative bodies created by local government and other bodies.

The ability of more formal faith group 'representatives' to engage with public policy agendas, or systems of governance, was varied. Although project leaders and workers at Hamara and Building Blocks demonstrated an impressive knowledge of the funding and legislative framework surrounding Faith Together in Leeds 11, this was not shared by many local residents. This is particularly true among Muslim residents, and extended to those who act as project trustees, a position which implies a degree of representation of and to the local community. The Muslim trustees very rarely attended board meetings. Christian and secular partners were most likely to attend board meetings, and also to initiate engagement with new possibilities for the project, such as Investors in People. There are several possible reasons for the apparent discrepancy in ability to engage. There are issues around literacy in the English language and in public systems and structures. There are also cultural differences in working practices (Farnell et al., 2003).<sup>167</sup> A further reason for the discrepancy in ability to engage is the extent to which individuals have the free time available to undertake such roles. In the Christian community there are professional community leaders in the form of ministers of religion who can take on these roles. There is no equivalent social role for Imams. Although Christian and secular partners were more likely to attend the meetings, many of these were attending in a professional capacity. Those who were attending in a voluntary capacity were more often retired, or were fitting in the meeting around other engagements. However, an important issue is the degree to which those elected or

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<sup>167</sup> The cultural difference was visible in a community meeting which I observed. The white Christian or secular participants arrived at the start of the meeting having received, along with everyone else, the relevant information in an accessible form. As the meeting started a local South Asian heritage, female, Muslim community worker made a few phone calls. Within fifteen minutes twelve local South Asian elders arrived at the meeting.



selected to take representational roles are committed to participation. In a report on social capital, this varying capacity was noted with regard to participation in governance:

Faith communities vary in their capacity and commitment to participation in governance. Conversely, engagement with 'Faith' requires new capacities in government (Furbey et al., 2006: 53).

Although a comment clearly related to the realm of government agencies, it is interesting to note the salience of this observation at different points in the public square. The faith communities vary in their capacity to engage with all sorts of bodies, and the bodies themselves need to develop the capacity to ensure this engagement. For instance, representation at the level of local governance was also contested.

A local man who is a committed secularist and humanist commented on his concerns about how the community was represented after the 2005 London bombings. Particularly, he had concerns about how outside agencies failed to approach representatives from outside the religions.

...after 7/7 both the police and the council, they looked for community leaders in Beeston and they went to the religious people which, they should be included but they went exclusively to them. And partly maybe it's because there aren't structures for other people to be recognised as leaders. And I don't particularly want to hold myself up and say "treat me as a leader" I'm not sure I want it but there is a bit missing, which is what I wanted to raise (Interviewee J, March 2006).

In particular, he provided a specific example where the inability of local officials to 'see' representatives who were not religious was evidenced:

...the council decided they wanted to organise some meetings that ended up happening in November ... I was involved in the steering group to work out how we were going to organise these things. And when the date was finally settled on it was a day that [the Methodist minister] couldn't do. And the council had sort of lined him up to chair these sessions. And you know 'What are we going to do?' 'Who else could possibly chair it?' And [she] said 'There are other residents in the room!' And she chaired the afternoon session and I chaired the evening one. And that was fine, but the council seemed, I don't want to pin it down to personalities, but they didn't seem to be able to see oh, but there will be other people around who can fulfil this role (Interviewee J, March 2006).

However, his concerns did not rest solely on a suspicion of religion, but also on the important question of whether religious figures are genuinely able to claim that they are representing a local community. He did feel that there is a tendency to 'look up to'



Christian leaders, both because of their religious role but also because of their activity in the local community:

...they definitely do have a standing and people like [the Methodist minister] is not just involved in religious matters; he's involved in community, similar to me in a sense. So I don't think people, people don't see him just as a Methodist minister. I have to say I'm very ignorant about the Imams in the mosques, I don't know them and I don't know, but they're obviously viewed in their own community importantly, but I'd pass them in the street and wouldn't know them. And there are some of the other Christian ministers that I'm aware of [the Anglican vicar]... he is out and about and I think people value that... People who aren't C of E or even Christian are aware of who he is. So they do have some standing. ... culturally, people see, "oh well you know man of the cloth, he's an important person, and a leader" (Interviewee J, March 2006).

For this respondent the issue of identity was crucial in this. He identified himself as 'a fairly sort of thought through, conscious atheist' keen to bolster the secular nature of activities in the local community. Yet, as quoted previously in chapter six, he also recognised that many members of the white community would 'still look and say well 'I'm a Christian and I don't know who the vicar is but I'm sure he's a good bloke and I'd look to him'. However, he felt moved to go on to ask 'But then what about the rest of us?' Although keen to recognise the good work of local religious leaders, particularly the Christian leaders of whom he was more aware, he nevertheless felt some unease at the privileging of religion in the local community. In a situation where a neighbourhood is seen through a religious lens, and the local machinery of the state seeks and approves religious representatives of an area, there is the potential for those who do not share a religious perspective to be misrepresented or under represented.

An important dimension to the issue of leadership and representation in dialogue between religions and the state is the role of the Church of England. As explored in chapter three, the Church of England is in some ways of declining importance in the life of the nation, but nevertheless it retains vestigial powers and cultural significance. In Beeston Hill the Church of England has a strong relationship with the Methodist church and it has been the Methodist minister who provided much of the impetus for the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project. Locally, therefore, the Anglican hegemony in matters of faith-state dialogue is not as evident as it can be at a national level. In order to explore this national dimension to faith-state relations, three short telephone interviews were conducted with individuals who have a national remit through their positions. All three were asked how they saw the role of the Church of England in relations between faiths and the state. Two respondents, a civil servant, and a senior Anglican, considered the



role of the Church of England to be potentially and actually very significant. The civil servant (Interviewee D, 12th July 2006) noted that the Church of England is: 'probably the best resourced voluntary organisation in the country' and 'has privileged access to institutions of public life'. He saw this as important in promoting access for others, and to some extent as a position shared with other mainstream Christian denominations, such as the Methodists. However, he also noted that this ability to promote access for others, 'is still from a position of privilege and power', and that the government commitment to diversity could be seen as difficult to equate with an established church. Some of the lessons that the Church of England could bring for the other religions were perhaps less obvious; for instance the lesson not 'to do their dirty washing in front of the government'.

A senior Anglican (Interviewee V, 15th February 2006) emphasised the extent to which he envisaged the relationship changing over time. Having recognised the role the Church of England has played in facilitating the involvement of other faiths in the public square, he noted that this had often been achieved via a focus on similarities. He felt that in the future there would be a more 'robust relationship' between the faiths and government, with 'differences fully acknowledged'. To this end, he felt that the Church of England's lead role would in the future need to be earned, partly through the support of other faiths, rather than inherited. The civil servant's concern that the Church of England's role as a facilitator was born out of a position of power is significant here. It is much easier for the Church of England to earn a lead role as they already have the resources in place. A specialist working in the field of faith-based organisations also noted this concern, recognising that the Christian communities, not just the Church of England, have a longer history, better resources and permanent full-time staff. All features which other faith groups do not necessarily have. She argued that it was important for Christian communities not to 'pursue their advantages' but instead to focus on empowering and facilitating full partnership with others (Interviewee F, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2006). She noted that this was particularly significant at a local level where Christians have the trust of agencies so can facilitate people coming together.

In Beeston Hill it was initially the Methodist church and minister that took the lead role in the Faith Together project. When the Methodist minister left the area the Anglican vicar continued this work. As individuals they brought a considerable degree of reflection to their interactions with people who were not Christian. Importantly, as

opposed to the national sphere, they were not operating from a significant position of power beyond the historical, cultural significance of the church. In Beeston Hill both the Anglican and Methodist churches have small, ageing congregations. Both financially and in terms of capacity they were marginal. However, the role of committed individuals who are employed to pursue this work is vital, and next to the physical space of the buildings was perhaps the vital component that the Christian community were able to bring to the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project. However, all formal inter-faith activity which ran alongside the Faith Together project was initiated by Anglicans, either locally or from the diocese. Although Methodists, and some United Reformed church and Roman Catholic Christians were also involved in these activities, the impetus was nevertheless from Church of England clergy. This is an interesting dimension to issues of leadership and representation in Beeston Hill. Clearly leaders within the Church of England in Beeston Hill have a profound concern with issues of inter-faith dialogue and take a significant lead in reflective activities, alongside an active role in co-working with Muslim neighbours on social action projects.<sup>168</sup>

#### *8.4. Intergroup Contact Theory and Community Cohesion*

One of the key themes in relations between the state and faith-based organisations in religiously diverse neighbourhoods is ‘community cohesion’. Although, as we have seen, this was a term which was of more or less importance as a ‘buzz word’ during the course of the fieldwork, and despite the contentious nature of the word ‘community’ discussed in chapter seven, this is nevertheless the dominant policy agenda concerning relations between different faith groups and concerning diverse neighbourhoods. The development of this policy agenda in response to the disturbances of 2001 was highlighted in chapter three. However, it is popularly believed that the influential Intergroup Contact Hypothesis proposed by Gordon Allport in the 1950s provides the theoretical underpinning to the UK government’s community cohesion strategy. Contact hypothesis, which is often referred to as a theory, was developed within the emerging field of social psychology during the American race conflicts of the 1950s and 1960s. Gordon Allport’s 1954 publication *The Nature of Prejudice* has had an enduring influence on the study of prejudice:

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<sup>168</sup> Whether this is a general feature of inter-faith dialogue activities, or a locally specific situation, it is beyond the remit of this study to say. However, it would be an interesting area of further research to survey local inter-faith activities and identify the degree to which Anglicans take a lead in these activities, and what they see as the key drivers for this type of activity.



...half a century after its publication, *The Nature of Prejudice* remains the most widely cited work on prejudice. The scope and endurance of its influence has been nothing short of remarkable (Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005a: 1).

Based on the evidence of his own and other's studies, Allport adopted a 'positive factors' approach which identified four features of contact situations which will result in reduced prejudice. These four 'contact conditions' are equal status between the groups, common goals, intergroup cooperation and the support of authorities, law or custom (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005: 264). These four conditions have variously been added to and changed over the intervening fifty years, but remain the basis for contact theorists.

It is clear to see the relevance of contact theory for the community cohesion agenda, and the ways in which this agenda seeks to promote the positive conditions for contact. By reducing prejudice communities are likely to be more cohesive and therefore socially and economically effective. The policy agenda provides the support of the state for co-working towards shared goals between different groups, based on equal status increasingly guaranteed by legislation. The Faith Together in Leeds 11 project provides a perfect example of such a project. However, there is also a clear overlap here with religious goals and concerns, not least, because prejudice against another religion and its followers is a significant barrier to dialogue of any kind. As will be explored in chapter nine, the relationship between contact theory, community cohesion, and faith groups' self understanding is under-explored and potentially both valuable and challenging. However, it is important within the context of relations between faith and state to note that theories which underpin important policy agendas, as well as the agendas themselves, can be tested in neighbourhoods and through projects such as Faith Together in Leeds 11; whether those involved in the administration of funding or consulting with faith groups are aware of this theoretical underpinning it is impossible to know.

### *8.5. Conclusion: Pragmatic Realities and Philosophical Ideals*

In this chapter some of the difficulties in the relationship between faith and state at a local level have been explored. The importance of accessing funding and organising representation, have been seen to be significant, as have concerns about the apparently transient nature of funding streams and policy agendas. Reports and consultations which take a national view of these issues rarely focus on the grassroots experience, and rarely speak to people other than the 'usual suspects'. For example, local religious leaders in

Beeston Hill appeared to have no knowledge of a recent consultation document on inter-faith action (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007) and responses to the consultation appear to have been channelled primarily through large organisations with regional or national remits. This chapter mainly quotes from those who are part of the locally-dominant discourse, but the discussion is informed by an awareness of the local demotic discourse about the state. For most local residents the policy agendas shaping their daily activities are of only marginal concern. Indeed, when asked what the major issues for the area were, even two local community activists identified 'litter'. It would be an interesting area of further study to map the extent to which local residents, local activists and those in local governance, share overlapping perceptions of the nature and concerns of an area.

For many local activists involved in Faith Together in Leeds 11 working with the state is about the constant balancing of pragmatic realities, e.g. accessing funding, and philosophical or theological ideals, e.g. a desire for social justice. Dialogue between Muslims and Christians in these projects is about justice and social action for the neighbourhood rather than purely theological concerns. Equally, philosophical or theological ideals are absent from negotiations with the machinery of the state, such as funding bodies, because this is a language which is largely absent, or treated suspiciously within policy agendas. For those leading a project such as Faith Together in Leeds 11 there is both a desire to be free from the burdens of being consulted, but also a desire to access funds they believe could assist their neighbourhood. The state wishes to co-opt the language and mechanics of inter-faith dialogue, but in so doing strips it of its theological significance, and sterilises it of the potential for conflict. Intergroup contact theory, where potentially the greatest possibilities exist for moving beyond pragmatism, is under discussed and recognised in the policy realm. Pragmatic realities and philosophical ideals are therefore constantly in tension in relations between religions and the state.

Jonathan Laurence, in a report for The Transatlantic Task Force on Immigration and Integration (2007) argues that dialogue between faith communities and the state is not usually intended to replace the usual political process of representation, but instead to provide a forum for discussing issues 'where public policy and religious practice intersect' (2007: 4). However, representation is a more complex matter than Laurence's brief report indicates. Faith-based organisations can be seen as ways to access



communities labelled 'hard to reach' because of language or cultural barriers. In this sense, representation is about the needs of disadvantaged neighbourhoods much more than religious practice. Also, as we have seen, in the UK the relationship between faith communities and the state is about service delivery and community cohesion as much as about representation on issues of religious importance. One of Laurence's conclusions is to, 'Consider that national and local dialogues can be mutually reinforcing' (2007: 16). I would seek to go beyond this and to argue that dialogues between different faiths, and the state, located locally, regionally and nationally, between leaders and community members are all significant for the political ends to which Laurence refers, as well as to other ends. Recognition of this multi-layered and multi-referenced field would not only facilitate a greater sense of representation, but would also encourage representation and leadership across the usual boundaries. The implications of this for Muslim-Christian dialogue would be far reaching.

## Chapter 9: Muslim-Christian Dialogue: Lived Reality

The preceding chapters have advanced the argument that religiously diverse neighbourhoods are more complex than the dominant discourse allows for. The contested and multiple nature of identity and community, and the problems that arise in how local groups respond to national policy agendas, indicate that relations between Muslims, Christians and the state are constructed at the demotic level in relationship with, but at a distance to, the dominant state discourses of community, identity and community cohesion. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, the demotic discourse of Muslim-Christian dialogue is also at a distance to the dominant theological discourse which relies on reified concepts of religious community, religious identity, and theological significance.

Inter-faith dialogue is increasingly seen as important in the development of cohesive communities. However, as was demonstrated in chapter two, many of the traditional theological texts of inter-faith dialogue neither represent the experiences of local communities, nor address their needs. In this chapter I will provide evidence for the way in which theology operates at the demotic level. The fieldwork demonstrates how the motivations for, and outcomes of, the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project were religiously significant and informed. However, the language of theologians of inter-faith dialogue concerning truth and meaning was notably absent. I shall argue that the needs and experiences of people living in religiously diverse communities are not met through the formal model of dialogue meetings with which most theologians still work. Instead, it is the informal, practical reality of sharing space and activities which both influences and is influenced by personal understandings of God and truth; the Anglican vicar of Beeston Hill, the Revd. Bob Shaw expressed this in a diocesan newsletter:

Inter-faith dialogue in Beeston Hill is not an intellectual exercise pursued by individuals who are interested in that kind of thing. It is a succession of ordinary everyday life encounters between people who come from different backgrounds. These encounters enlarge our vision of God's presence among us and are therefore very precious (2005: 4).

'Ordinary everyday life encounters' are not theologically informed, but they are religiously charged and significant. They are also politically important, providing the raw material for cohesive communities which the government seeks to encourage and enable. While policy makers draw on theories such as intergroup contact theory (Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005b) to inform their position on inter-faith dialogue,



religious leaders draw on the traditional area of inter-faith theology. This confusion of principles has not been noted in dialogue between faith groups and the state. While theology keeps inter-faith dialogue in an ivory tower, or at best a meeting of 'enthusiasts', and policy pursues community cohesion with limited reflection on religion, community members get on with the messy but fulfilling business of working and learning together.

Gerd Baumann (1996) theorised how inter-faith dialogue operated in the multi religious population of Southall. Here he argued that:

Local and ecumenical Inter-faith networks have questioned the boundaries of 'religious *communities*' and posited an overarching *community* of all 'people of faith'. ... The negotiation of religious *community* boundaries will show up processes, and local ideas, of religious convergence which can be neutralized by claims of encompassment or reference to a widely shared multicultural discourse of equal respect and equal representation for each *community* (1996: 35, italics in original).

These same processes of encompassment and convergence can be seen at work in Beeston Hill, and further complications to this pattern can also be observed. The different levels on which dialogue operates and the divergence between Christian and Muslim attitudes to, and expectations of, dialogue create an imbalance in the degree to which convergence and encompassment occurs for Christians and Muslims. Importantly, the extent to which convergences are recognised and the 'other' encompassed varies as much between individuals as between traditions. It is therefore unsurprising that the dominant discourse of the religious traditions have limited influence on the demotic discourse. As Baumann points out in reference to all communities and cultures, though I would read this in terms of religion specifically: '*Communities* are not self-evident collectives... and *cultures* are not merely the reifiable heritages that the dominant discourse stresses so exclusively' (1996: 186 italics in original).

### *9.1. Local Attitudes to Inter-faith Dialogue and Other Faiths*

The traditional theological understanding of inter-faith dialogue revolves around issues of truth and meaning. The most referenced models are those of inclusivism, exclusivism and pluralism (Barnes S.J., 2002; Hick, 1973; Race, 1983). However, in interviews and observations at Building Blocks and Hamara, nobody used these forms of language. Instead, those people who were interested in contact with people of other faiths

demonstrated open and expansive understandings of religion which were based on experience rather than teachings.

Part of this emphasis on experience was illustrated by an interview with a local atheist, who noted the faith 'in each other' that local people exhibited:

...the idea of faith is strong but it's faith that, for most people their religious faith takes the form of looking to see what good can be done in the community and how people can be brought together whether those people believe in God or not, or believe in each other really (Interviewee G, March 2005).

As an aspect of identity construction, doing good works and acting for the community have already been noted, in chapter six, as important orientations towards activism on behalf of the local community. However, related to this emphasis on doing good works is an emphasis on experience against theology. One local South Asian heritage Muslim woman, whose husband is heavily involved in Tablighi Jamaat, related through an interpreter the importance of 'being together'.<sup>169</sup> In answer to the question: 'Do you think it is a good idea for Christians and Muslims to work together, or do you think they should do things separately?' she commented that: 'It is good to do it together. It is good if children play together nicely. It is good if people learn about each other' (Interviewee T, October 2006). Although there had been attempts at conversation about her husband's work for Tablighi Jamaat, she did not make any reference to teachings or theology, but instead to the practical reality of 'being together'. This emphasis is in sharp distinction to the emphasis found in formal inter-faith dialogue, which few local Muslims were involved in.

The distinction between organised formal inter-faith dialogue and the purpose of the community centres was articulated by a male Muslim community worker, who commented that:

We're [Hamara and Building Blocks] just to promote, to bring the local community together, Christians, Muslims can get together. The inter-faith project that has a different remit all together, that is about bringing people together on a faith level, looking at the issues between Christians and Muslims and saying how can we deal with them, work with them on common ground etc. That's different (Interviewee L, June 2006).

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<sup>169</sup> Tablighi Jamaat is a revivalist organisation which is traditionally agnostic on political and economic issues, and is concerned with encouraging Muslims to be more observant and devout (Masud, 2000).



Underlying this distinction appears to be a definite separation between inter-faith dialogue as a religious activity, and contact between individuals in the community centres as a community cohesion activity. It is interesting that the difference between dialogue practices and cohesion practices are so identifiable to local community workers, though not as evident in policy. For instance, as we saw in chapter eight, the consultation document on inter-faith dialogue from the Department of Communities and Local Government (2007) understands 'inter faith activity to express meaningful interactions between people from different faith communities and between faith communities and wider civil society' (2007: 8). It also draws a distinction between side-by-side dialogue which 'relates to collaborative social action' and face-to-face dialogue which 'relates to dialogue which leads to faith communities having a better understanding of one another, including celebrating the values held in common as well as acknowledging distinctiveness' (2007: 8). None of this relates to the nature of truth claims or to the specific nature of religion. Indeed, it would be possible to replace the word 'faith' with the word 'ethnic' and observe little difference in meaning. The specifically religious nature of inter-faith dialogue is referred to in terms of shared principles such as altruism, which are concerned with serving others. As was argued in chapter eight, the policy arena has possibly adopted the language of inter-faith dialogue because of its similarity with that of intergroup contact theory, but has stripped inter-faith dialogue of theological content. What policy seeks to promote through the term inter-faith dialogue is in fact inter-faith social action. Indeed, if it sought to do more than this it would be supporting a specific theological position, as a positive orientation towards dialogue is itself a faith stance, which is open to contestation as discussed in chapter two. This was recognised by respondents in Beeston Hill, who met hostility to inter-faith dialogue, as well as co-operation.

Although many of those interviewed had a positive attitude to other religions, and to dialogue with those from other religions, there was some suspicion that these views were not shared by everyone. One Christian woman commented that, 'I think the average person in the congregation would, just like a lot of people outside, just think it's [Islam] wrong' (Interviewee B, July 2004). A Muslim woman echoed these sentiments: 'I think people are accepting other religions a little bit more, but the majority of people are still set in their old ways and aren't open to questions or interaction' (Interviewee K, August 2004). Throughout this study, the voices of those who object to dialogue are little in evidence, though these comments indicate they do exist in Beeston Hill. This is



an important methodological reflection, as the topic of my study to some extent determined the responses. Possibly because of the fear of being seen to be racist, or negative about the area, individuals did not volunteer negative opinions of the religiously other. Whereas journalists asking about the bombings found it easier to get interviews with those who had a 'bad news' story to tell, I was also limited to the 'good news' story that both the management of the centres, and the clientele, wanted to be told. As a local Methodist pointed out, congregation members who did not like the idea of working with Muslims had left the church, so I was unlikely to be able to talk to them: 'The people who didn't like the idea of inter-faith work just cleared off - after putting up a fierce resistance' (Interviewee N, June 2006). However, it is important that the centres were supported by people who see contact with others as positive, demonstrating that the mental space of the community centres was very much geared towards positive community cohesion. During observations it was on occasion obvious that individuals were nervous of approaching one another, or sought the company of those with whom they shared an ethnic or religious identity. During a meeting of Christians interested in inter-faith dialogue fear of 'the other' was reflected in the comment 'We're the liberal ones and we're still scared [of approaching Muslims]' (Observation Notes, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2004). However, this was not accompanied by obvious animosity and neither was it the dominant pattern of relations in the community centres.

The significance of local leaders in creating this mental space in the community centres, and more widely in the local community, was evident. In response to the question: 'Has Hamara and Building Blocks helped to bring the faiths together?' a discussion in a South Asian men's group contained the following exchange:

- E. We don't have any problems with it anyway.
- C. I think since it came together it's helped a lot to understand each other.
- E. Since 7/7 the whole community came together.
- C. I hadn't been in a church my whole life, living here with Faith Together I went to [a local Christian leader's] church, see the church inside, learn more about the Christian religion (Hamara Men's Group, June 2006).

As well as the importance of *knowledge*, a theme which will be returned to later, it is also notable that a local Christian leader was mentioned by name. The significance of the local leader, and bridge-builder, is evident. However, the local mosques and Imams were not mentioned in the context of relations between the religions in any interviews or observations. Instead, local Muslim community workers were seen as the leaders in



this context. It is interesting therefore to reflect on what attitudes inform the local leaders. The Anglican vicar expressed a strong sense of God's role in bringing Muslims and Christians together in Beeston:

Loving our neighbour means loving our Muslim neighbour. We are therefore beginning to see more clearly that God has something very profound to teach us in and through the meeting together of different Faiths and cultures. We have reached a challenging moment in our local and national life where God gives us a new opportunity to bring Faith to life by taking more seriously the multi-faith context in which we all exercise our ministry (Shaw, 2005).

However, he did not refer to any particular theologians, or to any specific theological positions, during interviews or observations. Instead, the nature of Christian witness in a religiously diverse environment, and a reading of the Bible focused on compassion, equality and justice are seen to be important motivators.<sup>170</sup> Equally, a local Methodist lay preacher commented that:

I think my respect for other religions has deepened as I've got to know people on an everyday level and got to know them as friends. But I always started out with that belief that you should respect everybody's religions. I think it is where people don't understand other's religions, when they prejudge them, that's when mistrust can develop - not working with reality, not working with what people really believe (Interviewee W, February 2005).

Again, knowledge and friendship are quoted as important, but issues of inter-faith theology such as truth and the nature of God are absent from the interview. An underlying assumption pervaded interviews with Christian leaders that Christians and Muslim pray to the same God but in different ways. This was also expressed by a South Asian heritage Muslim woman who works as an English teacher:

I think that everyone is entitled to worship and to pray. And if they choose to do that, that's theirs, then they should be left to do that. I think everyone, even the Hindus, the Sikhs, that's their way of praying. So long as they pray and they're doing something, because at the end of the day you're praying to the same person aren't you? But I personally feel that if they're praying let them pray. No religion teaches you to fight or to argue or to hate your neighbour as long as they're active and praying then that's an advantage isn't it, that's what I think (Interviewee K, August 2004).

A local Christian woman made a very similar comment about the equality of traditions:

I think the Muslims have a valid path, and I just think that, I mean, we both believe in the same God, and we follow Jesus, and they follow Muhammad. And it doesn't worry me that, you know, they're following Muhammad and I'm

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<sup>170</sup> It would seem likely that this orientation towards theology is related to the growth of the contextual theology and liberation theology movements which emphasise these features. However, this is an issue beyond the scope of the present study.

following Jesus. And I certainly would not go out and convert them (Interviewee B, July 2004).

Whilst the local Methodist Minister related the equality of traditions to the equality that was sought in the Faith Together project:

Trinity Church has less than thirty members. It's not a big, dynamic congregation. You wouldn't expect it to be a force for change. Yet, from the ordinary God has brought forth something extraordinary. We realised quite early in the evolution of the project that it was pretty unique. There are very few places where Muslims and Christians are working in equal partnership to regenerate their community. More often, Christians make part of their own space available to their Muslim neighbours. But we didn't think that was the right approach in Beeston Hill. We felt that we were being called to embrace full partnership working as a sign that faith in God can make a difference, whether that faith is expressed through Islam or through Christianity (Bishop, 2006).

All of the Christians interviewed, and the majority with whom I had informal conversations during participant observation, shared this belief that Islam and Christianity had more in common than separated them, and particularly that they worship the same God. As was noted in chapter two this appeared to be easier for Muslims, where the teachings regarding 'People of the Book' provided a basic ability to encompass Christianity, and to some degree rendered the whole enterprise of inter-faith dialogue, as traditionally understood in Christian theology, somewhat redundant.

Most Anglicans and Methodists were also not concerned with attempting to convert Muslims to Christianity, although many of the local congregations had a few members, however briefly, who were Christians fleeing persecution in Muslim countries.<sup>171</sup> One local Methodist woman expressed her beliefs about Islam and about mission in terms of the importance of people having a religious path, and the need to help those who do not have a religion:

I think there's enough shall we say English, white people who are in need of some spirituality. If the Muslims have got their own spirituality that's fine, you know (Interviewee B, July 2004).

Other denominations, particularly the Jesus Army, were actively seeking Muslim converts in Beeston Hill. Christian asylum seekers who had converted from Islam were more evident among this congregation, and during a service I observed, Bible passages were translated into Farsi for Iranian congregation members. Local, older, Muslim men

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<sup>171</sup> Although there clearly were Anglicans and Methodists who did believe in evangelising to Muslims, I rarely came across these people within the context of the community centres.



during a group interview expressed a limited knowledge of Christianity, but also a limited awareness of attempts to convert them. One member of the group said:

We used to have them come door to door giving a leaflet. Jehovah's Witness. I don't know what the difference between them [Christians] are. For me, I was taught that we're the same books you know book people like Christians. Only difference we thought when we came here was the difference between the drink and the bacon and things like this. That's the difference religious wise we thought. We are not being told what is the difference between the Christian and the Muslim by the church you know. I have only once been in the church myself, I was a very, very long time living in this country, nobody invited us (Hamara Men's Group, June 2006).

Rather than an attitude of resistance to Christian messages, which might be expected, this respondent seemed to be disappointed that local Christians had not made a greater effort to inform Muslims about Christianity.

As there was a spectrum of Christian attitudes towards mission to Muslims, so was there a spectrum of Muslim attitudes towards *da'wah* to Christians. It became notable in more formal dialogue meetings that for those Muslims who did choose to attend there was a specific religious orientation towards *da'wah* involved. Zakir Naik was mentioned as an important religious scholar on two separate occasions, though the Christians involved did not know that Naik promotes teachings specifically geared towards *da'wah*.<sup>172</sup> This was an interesting contrast to the Christians involved in dialogue activities, who viewed mission as completely inappropriate in this setting, and who also did not refer to any specific contemporary scholars or theologians when articulating their position regarding other faiths.

In the context of the failure of Christian theology to address the needs of the local community, the Anglican vicar again provided a particularly pertinent observation:

At each stage we have moved forward slowly but surely towards a deeper understanding and appreciation of one another's faith traditions and perspectives discovering that Christians and Muslims have much in common. Looking ahead I see a priority need to develop an authentic theology that will support Christians in their calling to engage with our Muslim neighbours as well as those of other faiths in the global village that Beeston Hill and the rest of the world has become (Shaw, 2007).

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<sup>172</sup> Sermons by the Indian Muslim Zakir Naik, and his teacher and co-religionist Ahmad Deedat are regularly shown on Peace TV, a popular English language satellite channel aimed at educating Muslims and promoting Islam. Deedat writes and speaks from within a tradition of anti-Christian polemic (Lewis, 2002: 194). Naik is a close follower of Deedat, and specialises in 'comparative religion', which tends to use the teachings of other faiths to offer proof for the primacy of Islam (Naik, 2007).



As will be seen below, during the period of fieldwork this desire to 'develop an authentic theology' was actively explored by the Anglican diocese via the *May I Call You Friend* programme. The focus here was on friendship, compassion, justice and equal regard. Yet the Muslims most commonly drawn into this friendship were informed by Muslim theology which is overtly orientated towards *da'wah*.

### 9.2. Formal Inter-Faith Dialogue

As identified in chapter two, many of the theologians of inter-faith dialogue assume a formal setting for dialogue which has a clear agenda around issues of concern. Although the argument of this thesis is that this formal dialogue is largely irrelevant to local communities, there were nevertheless many opportunities to observe and participate in formal dialogue activities both in the Hamara and Building Blocks centres, but also with local people outside the two buildings. As was noted in chapter eight, all of the formal dialogue activities that occurred during the fieldwork were organised by Anglicans, reflecting possibly both a theological inclination in Anglicanism, but also the assumed role of the Church of England in civil society. In order to properly situate the inter-faith dialogue experiences of Muslims and Christians in Beeston Hill it is necessary to consider both activities they took part in which were outside the community centre, as well as activities which were in Hamara or Building Blocks.

Perhaps the most notable involvement of local people in formal dialogue outside the Hamara and Building Blocks centres were the 'Trust or Terror' meetings, organised by the Anglican diocese with involvement from Muslims based in Leeds, though not Beeston Hill. These meetings were intended as city-wide gatherings, and as such had a broad, though principally Christian, constituency. After an initial meeting held at the Building Blocks centre, a further meeting was held at Leeds Grand Mosque. Leeds Grand Mosque is one of the largest mosques in Leeds and is housed in the former Roman Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart, built in the 1960s. The Mosque has an international congregation drawing on the local Universities. There is a large women's gallery overlooking the main prayer hall. It is very different to the mosques that are found in Beeston Hill.

Each of the Trust or Terror meetings had a particular theme, and the theme for this meeting was worship. The meeting was over the period for evening prayers so that these could be observed. The meeting was held in the women's gallery, thus meaning that the



women had to fit in behind those present at the meeting who were observing the men at prayer. The meeting broke off into small groups for discussion where Christians were mixed with the young Muslim men who had attended, but who had not attended the previous meeting at the Building Blocks centre. The conversation in the group with which I participated appeared typical of all the groups and centred on the regular topics in Muslim-Christian dialogue: the trinity as *shirk*, the differences between the Bible and the Qur'an, and between the roles of the Prophet Muhammad and Jesus. The Muslim men in the group were well informed about the traditional Muslim critique of Christianity. The Christians present were actively seeking knowledge rather than debate, and different positions were stated and challenged in a fairly formal session. At the end of the meeting there was convivial sharing of food and informal conversation. The small group of Christians from Beeston who had come to the meeting were interested and enthusiastic about the opportunity to visit the mosque and speak with Muslims. One of the Christian men was particularly struck by the youth of the Muslims who had come to the meeting, compared to the Christians, and also by the large number of Vicars and other Christian Ministers compared to the apparent absence of the Imam. Although a large number of the mosque congregation, drawn from across Leeds, had attended the meeting, only a handful of Christians from Beeston had travelled the relatively short distance to attend the meeting. Those that did attend were people who had already expressed interest in dialogue with Muslims, and were actively involved in the inter-faith group which was being established in Beeston Hill; this example of a formal inter-faith meeting outside the Faith Together space is useful in demonstrating that some of the features observed within the centres, to be explored next, are not unique to the experience of Hamara and Building Blocks, but are instead universal features of formal dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

Inside the centres, the Faith Together project itself organised a variety of events, many promoting or facilitating inter-faith dialogue as part of a wider community cohesion agenda of bringing a broad variety of local people together. These events included open community events, which involved inviting local people into the two centres to learn about Islam and Christianity or take part in community safety and other education. Multicultural street markets utilised the street between the two community centres as a shared space for interaction, and in this case enterprise. Some of the educational and cultural events were open to everyone, including children from local schools who came in class groups to take part in activities. Others, such as events to mark International



Women's Day, were specifically aimed at local adults, in this case women. The degree to which these events achieved a balanced mixture of local Christians, Muslims and those of other religions varied enormously. However, in general there was a very positive response to these events. Many local people saw these events as qualitatively different to previous attempts to encourage community cohesion. This was evidenced by a comment from a Muslim community worker who assisted in facilitating a group interview with Muslim male elders:

And over the last 30/40 years things have dramatically changed. On both sides. Although the Christians were accommodating, friendly and helpful but both faiths stuck to their own remits and didn't mix in those terms. But now the effort has been made and is being made to get different faiths to actually interact with one another, to learn about one another and to meet on common ground and move forward. Centres like Hamara and Building Blocks is a good bridge and it is moving towards that direction. The community café here, the different projects which we run here which encompass not just the Asian community, but trying to meet the needs of many different communities. Like these people themselves you know (Hamara Men's Group, June 2006).

However, there was some suspicion of activities, particularly from members of the local white community. During a 'Building Bridges' event in 2006 a local woman was overheard commenting on the amount of money being spent, and asking if it were going to really change anything in the local area. In part this was an issue of confusion between projects to increase community cohesion and those to promote regeneration, but it also demonstrated a critical perspective on these agendas.

Activities organised by the Faith Together project grew out of local knowledge of the neighbourhood, and were specifically aimed at addressing the issues that local leaderships considered important for the positive development of the area. The two principal objectives were encouraging dialogue in order to improve community cohesion, and providing information and resources to improve the health and safety of the local population. Activities organised by those from outside the local community, but hosted in the Faith Together community centres, often shared these objectives but also had further objectives.

The Trust or Terror meeting already described above, was one of a series of three with the first of the series being held at Building Blocks and the last of the series being held at Hamara. The initial meeting, in November 2004, was attended by approximately 40 people. The meeting was friendly, positive and orientated towards a more traditional



form of dialogue based on understanding books, beliefs and other specific knowledge. Although some mention was made of informal contact and friendship between people of different faiths, this was not a focus for the meeting in the same way as it was at the community events. The meeting was principally attended by white Christians from all over Leeds, though with several members of the Beeston churches in evidence also. Of the Muslims who did attend, many had come from Leeds Grand Mosque, rather than locally. A group of local South Asian young women left early in the meeting. Unlike the Building Bridges events, which attracted a large cross section of local people, this meeting seemed to have a very specific constituency. I noted in my fieldwork journal that it was:

Interesting that this is overt 'dialogue', but like minds speaking to like minds. Ministers, church activists etc much in evidence. Fundamental differences e.g. 'no way to heaven except through me', glossed over. Actually, completely ignored. Attitude of 'if we all got on better and understood each other better everything would be fine' (Observation Notes, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2004).

A few days after the meeting I was able to talk about it with a local Muslim woman (Interviewee K) who had been very involved in trying to get people to attend, but who nevertheless had her concerns about the meeting. She thought the language and style of presentation of the speakers was inappropriate for average people 'on the street'. However, she recognised that this was not a meeting of 'community members', by which she referred to the local South Asian Muslim population, or even necessarily intended for community leaders, but of enthusiasts from a wide geographical area.

This was even more in evidence at the final of the three Trust or Terror meetings, held in November 2005 at the Hamara centre, and already discussed in chapter seven as an example of meetings following the London bombings. The language and style of the meeting followed that of the previous meetings, with presentations and discussions which focused on knowledge of beliefs, practices and texts. The presentations were again from Christian clergy and the President of Leeds Grand Mosque, who has a reasonably high profile in Leeds and is much respected among both Christians and Muslims. A representative of the Anglican diocese who had organised the meeting introduced it by emphasising that dialogue is concerned with knowledge of one another rather than 'dissolving the categories of religion'. There were fewer local residents present at this meeting. A local Muslim boy had been asked to give a recitation from the Qur'an at the start of the meeting. He and his mother left shortly after this, leaving only a handful of Muslims, none of whom were local. However, at this meeting there were



also many fewer local Christians present. Informal conversations revealed that for some Christians who did not attend there was a nervousness of being at another community meeting which appeared to be related to the bombings. Others had not found the initial meeting as relevant to them as they had hoped. There was a sense that these local Christians found the content rather academic and heavy and felt at a distance to those who had travelled from across Leeds to these meetings out of a commitment to formal inter-faith dialogue, and thus furnished with more experience and ability to participate in this environment.

These meetings, held in the Faith Together in Leeds 11 community centres, but organised by outside bodies, demonstrated some of the important features of a more formal type of Muslim-Christian dialogue. Firstly, there was considerably more interest in these meetings from Christians than from Muslims. Although principally organised by the Anglican diocese, the Muslim co-organiser failed to get Muslims to attend the meetings which were not in a mosque. Secondly, these meetings tended to appeal to 'dialogue enthusiasts'. These individuals tended to be theologically literate and religiously motivated to be in dialogue with people of other religions. These meetings did not appeal to people with attenuated understandings of their religious identity, and were not intended to appeal to those who had no religious identity. Thirdly, there was a focus on knowledge. In part this springs from the previous observation, because of the theological motivation and literacy there was an enthusiasm for *knowing* more about 'the other', particularly in relation to beliefs, practices and texts. These second two features, religious literacy and pursuit of knowledge, appear to be intended and desirable qualities for the bulk of formal dialogue meetings. The lack of dialogue partners however is a significant problem which dialogue meetings face.

Clearly, there is something of a gulf between the content and constituency of formal meetings for Muslim-Christian dialogue, and the content and constituency of community events to encourage community cohesion. The latter attract people with limited knowledge and interest in other religions, provide a basic degree of information, but more importantly to the organisers, provide an opportunity for people to meet with one another informally. This type of informal event seemed to be attractive and relevant to many of the people living in Beeston Hill. Although seen by funding bodies and others as concerned with 'community cohesion', it has been my argument throughout that these types of informal contact, or 'living dialogue' are religiously as well as



socially significant. As has been evident already, this is a perspective that I shared with many local people in Beeston. For the local Anglican vicar especially, the informal, mundane and everyday dialogue of life in Beeston Hill provided significant theological insight.

In pursuit of his interest, the vicar established a group of local Methodists and Anglicans to explore the experience of living alongside people of other faiths. Although described as an inter-faith group, it was in reality more a group of those interested in these matters, rather than a gathering of people of different religions. Meeting in Building Blocks, and occasionally visiting other places, the group met every one or two months for most of the period of my fieldwork. Around a core group of approximately six, who attended virtually every meeting, there were a further ten people who were occasional attendees. The group used some materials including audio tapes, printed material and videos to provoke discussion and explore issues. Over time, the group focused on how, as Christians, they related to their Muslim neighbour. Local Muslims involved in the Hamara centre were invited to speak and provide their perspective on issues the group found interesting. Questions were asked and answered, often covering the same ground but nevertheless of interest to the group. Unlike the formal dialogue group, questions were often basic and there was more anecdote and informality. Many of the Christians expressed admiration for local Muslims, particularly for the way they maintained their sense of religious identity and worked to provide facilities for the local community.

One of the resources the group used at the very end of my research period was of particular interest in demonstrating an increasing awareness of the importance of informal contact in dialogue. The scheme, called *May I Call You Friend*, was developed by the Anglican diocese, the same group which had organised the Trust or Terror meetings, in conjunction with Bradford Churches for Dialogue and Diversity. Designed as a 'short course to help people to understand and develop inter-faith dialogue', the course is intended to: 'develop understanding between people of different faiths on a wide scale' and the principle of the course is: 'to develop dialogue on the basis of actual **encounter** with people of a different faith and then to **reflect** on that encounter' (Dobbin, 2007 emphasis in original). Unlike other formal dialogue events this course appeared to have a greater emphasis on inclusivity and was therefore intended to be relevant and accessible to a range of congregations, not just those with dialogue

enthusiasts. The four sessions began with a presentation about Islam and small group conversations between Muslims and Christians. This was followed by a meeting which reflected on this encounter and framed a number of questions, and then two meetings which sought to answer these questions and then make a plan for the way forward.

The meetings built on the relationships the local vicar had established, with mainly young (25-40 years) Muslim men from the local mosques taking part in the small group discussions. Approximately twenty five local Christians attended who were mainly older (50+ years) women. The meeting which sought to answer questions which had emerged was attended by a young Muslim woman who had already attended a gathering of the inter-faith group as an interlocutor. Although these meetings represented an attempt to more fully engage with the demotic Christian experience, and there was some intention for this to lead to theological reflection based on the local experience, it was interesting to note that many of the features of more formal Muslim-Christian dialogue were still evident. The questions which emerged were concerned with knowledge, e.g. about the role of women in Islam and the nature of heaven and hell, and had been covered in previous meetings of the inter-faith group. However other questions, concerning for instance the Islamic experience of God, were new. The Muslims who took part in the project appeared to see it as an opportunity for *da'wah* and the teachings of Zakir Naik were mentioned more than once.

Inside the two centres the opportunities for formal communication between Christians and Muslims were many and varied. As well as formal theological discussion, such as that organised by the diocese, there were also events aimed at a more general form of community dialogue as well as the inter-faith group which attempted to bridge the gap between the two by interpreting the experience of community dialogue through their Christian beliefs. Many of these formal meetings provided opportunities for informal as well as formal dialogue between people of different religious identities. Conversations over food, or about the weather, provided a different quality of contact to that attempted within the formal dialogic setting. Yet, as has been the argument throughout, these informal contacts of living dialogue are not without religious significance.



### 9.3. *Informal Inter-faith Dialogue*

Informal, living, dialogue is the most likely to affect the majority of people in any area, but its religious significance is overshadowed by the focus on formal meetings. For many people living in a religiously diverse area such as Beeston Hill the importance of conversation in the street or at the school gates is obvious. Local leaders such as the Anglican vicar noted this, as did other members of both Christian and Muslim communities, as we have seen above. Projects like *May I Call You Friend*, can be seen as an attempt to give more priority to friendship and living dialogue, as opposed to knowledge acquisition and theological debates. However, as has been shown, it is not easy to move away from the formal inter-faith model.

In Beeston Hill it was possible to see examples of avoidance of contact with the ‘other’, whether understood as ethically or religiously different, as well as examples of positive contact. The experience of one Muslim woman, who while posting Eid cards fell into conversation with a Christian man, who assumed they were early Christmas cards, provides a good example of informal but religiously informed contact. White and South Asian parents chatting about problems at the local schools, Muslim and Christian young men discussing football, white and South Asian older men discussing cars, Muslim and Christian women discussing cooking were all observed during my fieldwork. However, these contacts most often occurred in facilitated space, in environments where people were brought together, often for other reasons, but with a positive outcome of contact and dialogue.<sup>173</sup>

One of the male Muslim community workers identified this informal mixing as one of the important outcomes of the Hamara and Building Blocks centres:

Faith Together in Leeds 11 was set up to bring community together and they are coming together ... And the overall impact so far that we’ve seen is people are talking to one another now you know, even if they come and don’t talk in here, they go outside they talk outside, and then we provide community trips and there’s been occasions when we’ve taken people out on trips and we’ve taken the Asian and the White people together and we’ve provided food where we’ve let them serve themselves. And the good thing about that was that there were incidents where people from the same street, who live on the same street, for years have not spoken to each another. So they went on this trip, and they had to share food they spoke to one another and some made that comment and said “My God”, you know “I’ve lived on this street for so long and we never spoke to each other and now

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<sup>173</sup> There is clearly a need for further research to compare the informal dialogue of facilitated and non-facilitated spaces.



we're here talking". So that's the kind of impact our centres having (Interviewee L, June 2006).

The lack of this kind of informal relationship was noted by one respondent as a key failing in the experience of many people in Beeston Hill. As a white Christian who has converted to Islam and married a man whose family is from Pakistan, she has a particular insight into the problem:

I see integration as ... an Asian living next door to a white person and helping them just as much as you would help the Asian person across the road, ... a real interaction whereas ... I know within the Asian community, they tend to populate one area and they will live in very close proximity and buy the surrounding houses and their family will, and ... they end up becoming their own community within another community. I think a lot of other people feel alienated from their community, because they don't know the other language ... and that can build up barriers, and this is where events like the multicultural street market and other events like that are really good and really important to break down barriers and things like that (Interviewee A, August 2004).

It is also possible to note the way the Faith Together in Leeds 11 space had itself been built on informal friendships:

I think the relationship between us and Building Blocks is a very strong one because of the friendship that exists for instance between [local Muslim community worker] and [local Christian community worker] and me ... but I think what I like the most is the relationship of trust between the two organisations and that camaraderie and neighbourliness that's very strong (Interviewee R, February 2006).

It is easier to measure the benefits of such informal contact from a social or political perspective than from a religious perspective. However, informal contact between people of different religions, which I have termed 'living dialogue', provides the raw material for reflection on what it means to be a person of faith in contact with people of other faiths. As we saw in chapter two with the experience of theologians such as Robert Caspar (1991), this is not unknown to Christian theologians, but is not given the weight that perhaps it deserves. Although theologians know that personal contact is significant in how their beliefs develop, this does not necessarily influence the theologies they write. Equally, because the theologies they write are so distant from the lived realities of religiously diverse communities it is unsurprising that they have little effect on the lives of Christians living in Beeston Hill. Muslim scholars, such as Zakir Naik, appear to have more influence on Muslims living in Beeston Hill, perhaps because of the accessibility of their teachings via television. However, these teachings are orientated towards *da'wah* and provide a different form of guidance to that which is



found in Christian teachings. The profound difference between the religious experience of Muslims and Christians constantly influences formal inter-faith dialogue. Yet in the living dialogue, of conversations over tea, real people come to know what it is to be different. As was seen in considerations of the nature of religious identity in chapter six, there were no Christians or Muslims who identified inter-faith theologians as important in their evolving attitudes to people of other religions, but many who identified the importance of contact through the family, school or community centre. This contact is also promoted by policy makers as the key to improved community cohesion.

#### *9.4. Intergroup Contact Theory, Cohesion and Theology*

The possible significance of contact theory and the conditions for contact outlined in the theory have been discussed in chapter eight in relation to the community cohesion policy agenda. Many writers in the field of inter-faith relations identify necessary conditions for inter-faith dialogue to be effective. An example used in chapter two was that of Cornille (2006), who identified the importance of understanding, empathy, openness, commitment, humility, conviction, interconnection and generosity. Although these do not map onto the conditions for contact which Allport identified, they do relate to some of the additional factors identified by other theorists. Particularly, those factors related to one's own identity (commitment, conviction) and openness to the identity of the other (empathy, openness) relate to the observation that: 'retaining group salience in a positive, intimate, cross-group interaction appears to be the best way to optimize intergroup contact' (Kenworthy, Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, 2005: 283). Given the very similar nature of the two enterprises, dialogue between religions and reducing prejudice, it is unsurprising that there are similarities and relationships between theories of inter-faith dialogue and of contact theory. Undoubtedly there would be many more examples. However, it is also instructive to see where the two approaches may not overlap.

Importantly, the theologians who encourage inter-faith dialogue provide the 'support of authorities' which is one of the key factors for Allport's original formulation. However, there are many theologians, both Muslims and Christian, who do not support such dialogue, and thus provide a mixed message for religiously diverse communities. Arguably, the two religions of Islam and Christianity do not 'share equal status' in the UK. Although legislation prevents discrimination on the basis of religion, and attempts are made to involve Muslim leaders in consultation, this does little to balance the strength particularly of the Church of England in this country. Indeed, the Church of

England often takes on the role of leading attempts at dialogue - underlining the unequal power status between the two religions. 'Common goals' are provided by the common pursuit of faith, although some would argue the faiths are so different as to render this not a common goal. Interestingly, there is an increase in efforts by the church, as we have seen, to present 'religions' as something of a united voice to government. The discourse of similarity causes concern for many, leading to fears of syncretism, and may in itself undermine intergroup cooperation. Clearly, the field of Muslim-Christian dialogue is not ideal territory to explore the relevance of contact theory, as there are difficulties and confusions in how it might apply. However, the argument of this thesis has been that the informal contact of living dialogue between people of different religions must be seen as religiously significant. In contact theory there is some evidence of the social significance of such contact which helps to demonstrate its religious significance.

In the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project, Muslims and Christians consciously seek equal status (see, for example, the efforts to ensure Muslim 'ownership of space' described in chapter four), they share the common goal of providing community services to a disadvantaged neighbourhood, they cooperate across group differences, and they not only have the support of the authorities via their funding, but also in turn become an authority which supports smaller projects. Faith Together in Leeds 11, on a very simple level, satisfies the positive factors required for decreased prejudice. This effect is seen in those people intimately involved in the project, and they in turn influence the physical, social and mental space of the buildings to encourage positive contact between those who use the space. This then becomes a religiously significant space as the role of religion is observed in the buildings and their activities. As 'contact per se has a reliable and independent effect ... on the reduction of prejudice' (Kenworthy et al., 2005: 283) it is therefore unsurprising that the Faith Together in Leeds 11 space would support a reduction in prejudice based on religion. This must surely be the most basic step in any possibility of Muslim-Christian dialogue. Arguably, as well, it is the most important to Muslims and Christians living in local communities. Some may have religious objections to discussing deep theological issues, but all would see the benefit of being able to live in a cohesive community where prejudice did not dictate the nature of relationships.



As was seen in chapter eight, the reality of community cohesion strategies is often at a distance to the policy ideal. Funding does not always seem to work as effectively as it might. Indeed, the personal commitment of individuals leading the Faith Together project has been as important as the policy environment in creating a religiously significant space for ‘living dialogue’ – contact – between people of different religions. Contact theory provides a theoretical context for the reality of Muslim-Christian dialogue which is pursued at the demotic level in religiously diverse neighbourhoods. The relationship between community cohesion and inter-faith dialogue is clear. It is a relationship which the government appears to seek to exploit. It is not, however, a relationship that theologians are actively exploring. This is a significant failing. If the policy agenda is allowed to set the terms of inter-faith dialogue there is a very real risk that the religious content of encounters will be ‘hollowed out’. In a secular environment, wariness of statements of faith, or of being seen to support religion, could reduce the religious significance of living dialogue.

#### *9.5. Conclusion: Informal Dialogue as a Religious Imperative*

This chapter has sought to demonstrate the importance of the demotic discourse of inter-faith dialogue. It has been argued that dominant discourses of dialogue privilege a theological position which is principally Christian, and which fails to value the significance of the informal relationships between people. At best, the dominant discourse sees the demotic as a necessary precursor to ‘real’ dialogue, which is about truth and meaning. Yet a woman in a religiously diverse neighbourhood, who has acted out of deep Christian conviction to effect real change for the benefit of her neighbours, can comment that, ‘I’m not worried about deep theological things you know’. In the lived reality of places like Beeston Hill there is a taken-for-granted response to theology that sees it as irrelevant to the real needs and issues of a local community. Contact between Muslim and Christian leaders in international conferences continues to be important and high-profile (Ipgrave, 2002). In Beeston Hill, however, there is as little knowledge about these gatherings of leaders and academics as there is about the library shelves of books exploring the truth claims of Islam and Christianity. Meanwhile, the policy agenda of community cohesion has the potential to steal the religious significance from living dialogue, removing a valuable opportunity for Muslims and Christians to develop more varied and nuanced understandings of what it is to be a person of faith in the present day.

Yet the lived reality of Muslim-Christian dialogue is more than a potential tool to be used in the policy agenda of the state. Arguably, the living dialogue between Muslims and Christians seeking to be better neighbours to one another is also theologically significant. Religious imperatives to seek justice and support the local community are more likely to be achieved in partnership and through co-working between the variety of people who live in a religiously diverse neighbourhood such as Beeston Hill. As we have seen, this neighbourliness also contributes to the development of a religious identity which is tolerant and expansive. In Beeston Hill personal theologies which could be described as inclusivist or pluralist, and which value and respect difference, develop not through theological texts but through the lived reality of informal, living dialogue between Muslims and Christians.



### **Conclusion: Faiths Together?**

Throughout this thesis an argument has been advanced that what happens in local, informal, contacts between Muslims and Christians is more important than is often assumed by policy makers and theologians. Alongside this general conclusion a number of more minor conclusions, based on the fieldwork and its contextualisation in academic and other debates, have significance in a range of fields.

Methodologically, the approach taken in this thesis has been described as rooted in religious studies as an academic field. As such, and because of the detailed consideration of what this might mean, the thesis provides an example of how a small-scale local study can be conducted in religious studies, sensitive to the meta-theoretical concerns of the field, but not limited by them. The dynamics of the religious studies approach, as it has evolved in the particular institution within which the study has been carried out, have been evident throughout. The importance of the local and small scale has been recognised, and a variety of approaches and sources have been adopted from a range of disciplines in order to fully pursue the arguments. Insights from disciplines ranging from history, sociology, anthropology, social policy, social psychology and theology have required a broad brush approach to theory but have produced more detailed and nuanced accounts of key themes, such as identity and community, than could have been developed from the resources of a single discipline.

Despite the theoretical breadth adopted, the fieldwork methodology has been specific and detailed. It has produced some unexpected but valuable conclusions particularly concerning fieldwork ethics. Problematics around informed consent have been particularly important, but so too have discussions concerning reciprocity and what it means to be an active participant observer. This attention to detail in the fieldwork methodology was significant and proved to be necessary after the London bombings of 2005. Contacts were maintained and it was possible to continue to pursue my fieldwork. This does not reduce the significance of the fieldwork opportunities which were lost as a result of the media intrusion in Beeston Hill. The lack of response from members of local mosques and young people is an unavoidable failing of this study, but does not render it incomplete. Rather, findings which relate to adults and those who are not involved in local institutions are themselves valuable, and provide a significant body of data alone. Arguably, this lends weight to a critique of many studies, particularly of

Islam, which focus on institutional forms of religion rather than the 'soft networks' of family, friendship groups and neighbours which this study has accessed in particular.

Within the detailed context of the historical and contemporary relationship between Muslims and Christians, and religions and the state, the fieldwork illustrates four areas of significance. Identity, community, the policy environment and the lived reality of dialogue emerged from the fieldwork as the main issues when considering the relationships between Muslims, Christians and the state. Each of these issues is mutually implicated and reinforcing. They have also been defined by a very particular division, borrowed from Gerd Baumann (1996), between dominant reified discourses, and the demotic discourse of life in a religiously diverse and socially and economically disadvantaged neighbourhood.

Unlike dominant discourses which have a tendency to reify the concept of personal religious identity, and present an image of the paradigmatic 'Muslim' or 'Christian', the demotic discourse of personal identity adopts features from this dominant discourse but also manages the complexity of influences such as ethnicity, social and economic status, and life experiences in presenting complex personal religious identities. Individuals who were recognised as 'practising' members of a faith group would nonetheless have hugely varied understandings of their religion. In the Christian context particularly, it was possible to observe quite unorthodox theological views. The feature of personal religious identity which is most significant in the present context is how people understood themselves in relation to people of different religions. Here it has been evident that a key issue is contact, or living dialogue, rather than religious teachings regarding other faiths. Universally, respondents identified the reality of living alongside people of different religions as crucial in their inclusive or pluralist theologies. The only respondents who specifically identified particular teachings or theologies were young Muslims who referred to the teachings of Zakir Naik and Ahmed Deedat in relation to *da'wah*. However, their understandings of these teachings were broad and expansive and attitudes to *da'wah* were more about being 'good Muslims' than a more active form of 'missionary' activity.

Related to the complexity of personal identity is the nature of 'community'. Communities are formed in various ways, in various situations, and to various degrees by people who share certain identities within the multitude of other identities which



they may or may not share. Communities are not the monolithic or static edifices which dominant discourses may suggest. Instead, as was seen in Beeston Hill following the London bombings of 2005, the demotic discourse of community is infinitely pliable and can be presented in a variety of ways to suit a variety of situations. Indeed, 'community' became defined by the nature of the threat against it. Where negative media reporting focused on the social and economic deprivation of the locality, 'community' was articulated around geography, and the pride and hard work of local residents was emphasised. However, where the outside emphasis was on religion, the 'community' represented was that of a religiously cohesive community demonstrated through the Faith Together in Leeds 11 project.

The complexity of community was most obviously lacking in the relationship between the people of Beeston Hill and the policy environment in which projects such as Faith Together in Leeds 11 exist. Which 'community' was being represented and by whom was a contentious issue, and was related to the question of funding. Which groups could get money for which activities required constant re-articulations of both the projects seeking funding and the communities they served. Most significantly for this study the community cohesion agenda was important to the analysis of a project such as Faith Together in Leeds 11, yet potentially problematic. The Faith Together project self-consciously promoted a community cohesion agenda but in a context where the policy environment was felt to be constantly changing and where funding was perceived to not necessarily follow policy. The policy language of localism, for instance, was undermined by the requirement for small local groups to achieve national dissemination of their good practice.

Running throughout these strands of the thesis have been issues about leadership. The importance of recognised leadership in articulations of community is evident. However, there is also an extent to which various forms of leadership indicate how dominant discourses can be locally and nationally operative. In Beeston Hill, although nationally recognised religious leaders may be seen as distant and irrelevant, local religious leaders and community workers have an important role. Not only are certain individuals seen as key figures in the development of projects and representing the neighbourhood to the outside, these figures also represent a locally dominant discourse. In the same way that state and theological discourses are distant from the demotic, so too this local dominant discourse can be at a distance to the demotic. This was particularly evident in Beeston



Hill following the London bombings of 2005. Local leaders chose to represent Beeston as cohesive in a way that the demotic discourse on the street may have doubted. However, because these local leaders had sufficient respect and trust in the locality, they were able, to some extent, to create the reality they sought. It is impossible to know whether there would have been greater tension in Beeston Hill had there not been such an emphasis from local leaders on the cohesiveness of the local community. It seems plausible however that the proactive efforts of local leaders were important in preventing local conflict.

The complexity of identity, community, leadership and policy, provide a background to a more specific critique of the role of theology in religiously diverse neighbourhoods. As a dominant discourse, inter-faith theology privileges a theological position which is principally Christian, is philosophically and doctrinally orientated, and tends towards a pluralist understanding of religious diversity. On the whole inter-faith theology fails to value the significance of the informal relationships or living dialogue between people who live alongside one another in religiously diverse neighbourhoods. At best, the dominant discourse sees the demotic as a necessary precursor to 'real' dialogue, which is about doctrinal truth and textual meaning. Issues such as doctrinal truth claims are however notably absent from the demotic discourse, where Muslim-Christian dialogue appears to put aside issues of doctrine and text in favour of concerns about social justice and peaceful coexistence. A woman who has acted out of deep Christian conviction to effect real change for the benefit of her neighbours can comment that: 'I'm not worried about deep theological things you know'. In the lived reality of places like Beeston Hill there is a taken-for-granted response to theology that sees it as irrelevant to the real needs and issues of a local community. Contact between Muslim and Christian leaders in international conferences continues to be important and high-profile, and is supported by governments and politicians as well as religious organisations and individuals. In Beeston Hill, however, there is little awareness of, or interest in, either these high profile meetings or the considerable body of principally academic literature concerning inter-faith dialogue. Arguably, therefore, theology is silent where it should speak most loudly and listen most intently. Practical accommodations around religious diversity are hugely significant in both personal religious identity and peaceful neighbourhoods yet these accommodations appear in Beeston Hill to be neither informed by, or do themselves inform, theological discourses of Muslim-Christian relations.



The implications of these conclusions are far reaching, but require further research to substantiate whether they are universally valid. The particularity of the situation in Beeston Hill, with a unique Muslim-Christian-secular partnership project, and an unexpected notoriety following the London bombings of 2005 make it especially significant but also potentially limits the ability to generalise from these outcomes. Building upon these conclusions, further research would be particularly valuable in a variety of areas. Firstly, in the arena of social policy there is a need for a more general evaluation of the role of the community cohesion agenda, how it is understood locally and nationally, and the validity of the theoretical underpinning of intergroup contact theory. How contact theory might relate to inter-faith dialogue is an area for more theoretical and empirical research. The objectives of such research should be to uncover the complexity of community, identity and religion in the UK, and to therefore nuance the policy agenda in order to make it more responsive and more effective.

Secondly, there is a need for further research concerning the disjunction between the reified dominant discourse of Muslim-Christian dialogue, and the reality of informal living dialogue between Muslims and Christians in religiously diverse neighbourhoods. In the same way that liberation and contextual theology have been effective in bringing Christian theology of social justice into the Christian mainstream, so too could theologies of dialogue have more practical and far reaching applications. In Muslim scholarship too there is an opportunity to challenge Christian dominance in this area, by moving beyond a focus on *da'wah* as a principal response to religious diversity and also be setting, rather than responding to, the academic agenda in the study and theology of Muslim-Christian relations.

Lastly, there is a need in religious studies to take seriously the theological implications of studies of local religious expression and experience, and for scholars of theology to take seriously the findings of religious studies. As was argued in chapter one, policing the boundary between the academic fields of religious studies and theology is impossible and endlessly fraught. Theology often forms the raw material for the study of religions, in terms of religious identity, community, symbols and practices. Yet these studies are also theologically significant. What religious people 'do' is more than a by-product of what they 'believe'. Instead, what religious people 'do' can itself inform what they 'believe', as is evident in relation to Muslim-Christian dialogue. The

implications of this for the relationship between religious studies and theology could be far reaching.



## Appendix 1: Interviewee Information

Anonymised signifiers for interviewees:

- A= Resident of Beeston, though not born locally. White female. Married to a Pakistani heritage man. Professional occupation. Converted from Christianity to Islam as a young adult. Age group 30-50.
- B= Resident of Beeston Hill, born locally. White female. Methodist Christian from childhood. Age group 50-70.
- C= Member of Hamara Men's group. Resident of Beeston Hill. Born in Pakistan, male. Muslim. Age group 50-70.
- D= Civil servant. London based, male. Age group 50-70.
- E= Member of Hamara Men's group. Resident of Beeston Hill. Born in Pakistan, male. Muslim. Age group 50-70.
- F= Director of national organisation. Female.
- G= Resident of Beeston, though not born locally. Community activist. White female. Atheist. Age group 50-70.
- H= Community worker in Beeston Hill. Not locally resident. Muslim. British born, Pakistani heritage male. Age group 30-50.
- J= Resident of Beeston, though not born locally. Community activist. White male. Atheist. Age group 30-50.
- K= Resident of Beeston Hill. British born, Pakistani heritage, female. Language teacher. Muslim. Age group 30-50.
- L= Community worker in Beeston Hill. Not locally resident. Muslim. Born in Pakistan, relocated to England as a very young child, male. Age group 50-70.
- M= Resident and community activist in Beeston Hill. Born locally, Pakistani heritage, female. Muslim. Age group 30-50.
- N= Resident of Beeston Hill, though not born locally. Community activist and Christian religious leader, male. Age group 30-50.
- R= Community worker in Beeston Hill. Not locally resident. Muslim. British born, Pakistani heritage, female. Age group 30-50.
- S= Resident of Beeston Hill, born locally. Community activist and Christian religious leader, male. Age group 50-70.
- T= Resident of Beeston Hill. Born in Pakistan, relocated to UK after marriage, female. Muslim. Age group under 30.
- V= Ordained Anglican male with national role regarding inter-faith issues.

W= Resident and community worker in Beeston Hill. Not locally born. White female. Active Methodist Christian since childhood. Age group 30-50.

(Not all letters were used in order to avoid confusion in using 'I' 'O' etc.)



## Appendix 2: Informed consent poster 2004

## Have you seen this woman?



Hello, my name is Mel Prideaux. I am a student at Leeds University working for a PhD in Religious Studies. I am spending time at the Hamara and Building Blocks centres doing research about how Muslims and Christians work together. I am interviewing some people who use and work at the centres to get detailed information and opinions. I am observing and getting involved with groups at both centres to get more general understanding of the centres, the people who use them, and the neighbourhood. When I interview people I may quote them in my project. When I am observing and getting involved I will not quote people, unless I ask their permission. I hope that my work will be published in part, in academic journals for instance.

I am grateful to the Faith Together in Leeds 11 board for giving me permission to do this research. If you have any concerns about my attendance at a group you take part in, or would like more information about my project, please do come and speak to me. You can contact me by email: [melpx@hotmail.com](mailto:melpx@hotmail.com), or on 07769867598.

ہیلو - میرا نام میل پریڈو ہے۔ میں لیڈز یونیورسٹی میں مذہبی تعلیم میں پی ایچ ڈی حاصل کر رہی ہوں۔ میں کچھ وقت ہمارا سنٹر اور بلڈنگ بلاکس میں تحقیق کر رہی ہوں کہ مسلمان اور عیسائی مل کر کام کیسے کرتے ہیں۔ جو لوگ سینٹر میں کام کرتے ہیں اور استعمال کرتے ہیں ان سے چند سوالات پوچھوں گی تاکہ میں تفصیلی معلومات اور رائے حاصل کر سکوں۔ میں غور سے مشاہدہ کروں گی اور ان دونوں سینٹرز کے استعمال کرنے والوں میں مشارکت کروں گی تاکہ مجھے سینٹروں کی مجموعی سمجھ، سینٹر استعمال کرنے والوں اور علاقہ کی سمجھ حاصل ہو سکے۔ میں اپنا پروجیکٹ مکمل کرتے وقت شاید ان لوگوں کا حوالہ پروجیکٹ میں شامل کروں جن سے میں انٹرویو لے رکھے ہوں گے۔ کام کے دوران مشاہدہ کرتے ہوئے اور لوگوں سے میل ملاپ کے اوقات میں جو بھی گفتگو ان سے ہوگی اس پر میں حوالہ ان متعلقہ لوگوں کی اجازت کے بغیر نہ دوں گی۔ میں امید کرتی ہوں کہ آئندہ میرا کام علمی رسالوں میں شائع ہوگا۔

میں فیتھ ٹوگتھر لیڈز 11 کے بورڈ والوں کی مشکور ہوں جنہوں نے مجھے یہ تحقیق کرنے کی اجازت دی۔ اگر آپ کو میری حاضری کے بارے میں کسی قسم کی تشویش ہو یا پروجیکٹ کے بارے میں مزید معلومات چاہیے تو میرے پاس ضرور آکر بات کرنا۔ آپ مجھ سے ای میل پر رابطہ قائم کر سکتے ہیں [melpx@hotmail.com](mailto:melpx@hotmail.com) یا فون نمبر 07769867598۔



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