

YOU DL: deny laughing DMTFB: dream times link in parallel gutters DWTDR: but what the heck do I know G&G: chuckle & grin CID: crying in disgrace CUL: see you later YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR KIDS ARE SAYING ONLINE. CYO: see you online DBA: doing business as usual DL: dead link DLTBBB: don't let the bed bugs bite DIKU: do I know you? EMFBI: excuse me for butting in F2F: face to face FC: fingers crossed FISH: first in, still here FMTYEWTK: far more than you ever wanted to know FOMCI: falling off my chair laughing ETRMH: from the bottom of my heart FIID:

TENSIONS

Many Muslims in Britain Tell of Feeling Torn Between Competing Identities



Andrew Testa for The New York Times

Young Muslim women shopped Saturday in Walthamstow, a district of eastern London where many Muslims live, including some of the terrorism plot suspects arrested last week.

By SARAH LYALL and IAN FISHER Published: August 13, 2006

LONDON, Aug. 12 — As a Muslim, Qadeer Ahmed says, he believes that violence against civilians is never justified. But as a British Muslim, he is not surprised to find the country once again at the center of a reported terrorist plot by homegrown extremists.

“When people say it’s Bush and Blair against the world, it’s difficult to argue with them,” said Mr. Ahmed, 37, a leader of the largest mosque in High Wycombe, where half a dozen young British Muslims were among the 24 arrested Thursday in what the authorities said was an elaborate plan to blow up planes on trans-Atlantic routes.

Despite government efforts over the last several years to reach out to community leaders — a tricky proposition, given that Muslims hardly speak with one voice — many Muslims have hardened their resentment of their country.

British policies in Afghanistan and Iraq, and now in Lebanon, are just the most recent in a long list of

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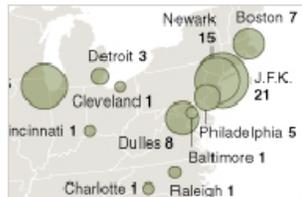


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James Hill for The New York Times

Taji Mustafa, of Hizb ut-Tahrir, at a news conference Saturday in London's West End. He said his group's principles do not breed extremism.

grievances — cultural, economic and political — among Muslims here. For a few, that has manifested itself in extremism and violence. For many others, it has meant a sharpening of a continuing struggle between two competing identities.

In a recent poll of Muslims in 13 countries conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Project, 81 percent of those surveyed in [Britain](#) said they considered themselves Muslims first and Britons second. That contrasts with Spain, where 69 percent of those surveyed considered themselves Muslims first and Spaniards second; Germany, where the comparable number is 66 percent, and even Jordan, with 67 percent.

Britain has never aspired to be a melting pot, and even second- and third-generation immigrants in England are likely to identify themselves — and, more significantly, be identified by the English — as belonging to their family's country of origin.

"In the U.S., people routinely talk of Irish-Americans, Portuguese-Americans, You Name It-Americans, but have you ever heard the English talk that way?" asked Roger Ballard, director of the center for applied South Asian studies at the University of Manchester. "The English have always had, since the days of the Reformation, this strong commitment to homogeneity."

For Muslims, with their adherence to religion in a country that is aggressively secular and their feelings of brotherhood with Muslims in the Middle East, the feelings of alienation are particularly acute.

"The war on terrorism is the war on us," said Mohammed Mowaz, 29, a computer engineer interviewed outside the Queen's Road Mosque in Walthamstow.

Nazim Akram, 23, an accounting trainee, said in an interview outside the mosque that he was skeptical about anything the authorities said, particularly after the botched raid by 250 officers in the Forest Gate section of London in June. After shooting a Muslim suspect, destroying his house, and arresting him and another Muslim man on suspicion of making chemical weapons, the police released them and said they had made a mistake.

Similarly, Mr. Akram said he believed that the suspects in the recent bombing case were "just normal guys."

Those who study Muslims in England say the current generation of young people — those whose fathers moved here in the 1960's to work in the textile mills in the Midlands and the north — is more inclined to be at odds with British society.

Many of the first wave of immigrants were from rural [Pakistan](#), spoke poor English and

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never integrated much. But the generation that is coming of age now is caught between the traditionalism of their parents and the Western ideas they have been born in to, and the result can be toxic.

“They are deeply confused, because they have been brought up in Britain and are actually very Westernized,” Mr. Ballard said. “They’re seeking to discover an Islam through Western ideas.” And, he said, they are rereading in literal terms.

Muslim ties to tradition are reinforced by frequent visits to where their families came from, and by arranged marriages to cousins who are likely to come from small Pakistani villages.

Feeling apart from mainstream society, finding it hard to get work in the depressed former mill towns near Manchester and Birmingham, some young men turn to local mosques — often run by imams who have moved from rural Pakistan themselves — as social, religious and educational centers.

Khalid Mahmood, a member of Parliament from Birmingham, said Muslims found it all too easy to shrug off the radicalization of some parts of their culture, particularly among young men.

“They are reluctant to discuss what reality is and come to terms with it,” he said.

Mr. Mahmood is a friend of the family of Tayib Rauf, one of the suspects whose arrest was announced Thursday, and he said that the Rauf family was comfortably off and not in any way fundamentalist. He suspected, he said, that Mr. Rauf had become radicalized in college, perhaps by listening to a speech from a visiting speaker.

In a country where, for instance, Muslims were free to raise placards denouncing freedom of speech during a demonstration protesting the publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed, Mr. Mahmood said British tolerance had allowed extremism to flourish. “We’ve been reluctant to curb freedom of expression or religious rights,” he said. “We’ve played host to people who weren’t allowed in their own country of origin.”

Some British Muslims are repelled by what they see as the decadence and libertinism of Western society, particularly obvious in Britain.

“Among younger Brits in urban areas, which is where most British Muslims live, we drink more alcohol faster, sleep around more, live less in long-lasting, two-parent families, and worship less than almost anywhere else in the world,” the writer Timothy Garton Ash argued in *The Guardian* recently. “It’s clear from what young British Muslims themselves say that part of their reaction is against this kind of secular, hedonistic, anomic lifestyle.”

But Taji Mustafa, a spokesman for the British branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir, a nonviolent group advocating a unified Muslim government in Muslim countries, said rejecting Western permissiveness in the name of Islam does not breed extremism.

“People say, ‘Oh, he became more religious,’ ” Mr. Mustafa said in an interview. “What does that mean? Well, instead of spending time at the pub, he may spend more time with his family. When someone says, ‘I’m Muslim first,’ does that mean, ‘I want to go bomb the Underground?’ Nonsense!”

If some Muslims see themselves as apart from British society, said Massoud Shadajares, chairman of the Islamic Human Rights Commission, the feelings are cruelly reinforced

by the British.

As an illustration, Mr. Shadajares described how at the time of the World Cup tournament in June, a secular Muslim friend from Nottingham ducked in to a pub to find the England team’s latest score.

“He walked in and said, ‘Hey, guys, how are we doing?’ ” Mr. Shadajares said. “And one of the English guys said, ‘I didn’t know that Pakistan was playing today.’ ”

By the same token, when Sajid Mahmood, a cricket star of Pakistani descent, took the field with the English team this week against Pakistan, fans of Pakistani descent booed him and called him a traitor.

Heather Timmons contributed reporting from Birmingham, England, for this article, and Souad Mekhennet and Karla Adam from London.

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