

# **Muslims in Ireland: adaptation and integration**

by

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## Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in consideration for any degree. This thesis is the result of my own investigations.

Signed .....

Date .....

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## Muslims in Ireland: adaptation and integration

### Abstract

This study explores the lived experiences of Muslims living in Ireland. It focuses particularly on challenges that Muslims face in relation to the practice of their religion and in relation to their integration with the wider non-Muslim Irish society. The research has adopted a phenomenological approach and has utilized a qualitative method of data collection. Twenty-one semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with Muslims from a range of cultural, social and religious backgrounds. The research has found that simplified categorizations of identity and integration are inadequate to portray the nuanced levels of diversity present within the Muslim population of Ireland. It found that the significant challenges that Muslims in Ireland face in relation to the practice of their religion and their adherence to religiously prescribed rules can be overcome through adaptation to Irish culture and society. It also found that discrimination and misunderstandings of Islam constitute the major challenges that Muslims face in relation to integration and that these are fuelled by meta-narratives of Islam as enemy and media misrepresentations.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Except for four months of the year when taboos barred all fighting, murder and raid and treachery, ravishing and plundering constituted the normal mode and pattern of life, in a land where the struggle for existence was hard and bitter. Islam was born in this inhospitable milieu and survived to become a world religion.

(Balyuzi, 1976: 9)

Muslims first started arriving in Ireland in large groups in the 1950s but up to that date very little is known about Islam in Ireland. Between the 1950s and 90s the Muslim population in Ireland grew steadily but slowly. As recently as 1991 there were less than four thousand Muslims living in the country. However, in the past two decades this pattern of growth has changed dramatically and by 2006 there were almost 33,000 Muslims living in Ireland (Census 2006). That represents a growth rate of 700% over 15 years and makes Islam the fastest growing non-Christian religion in Ireland today.

Whilst research on the subject of Islam in Ireland has been very limited, studies to date indicate that Muslims in Ireland are not integrating at social and cultural levels into mainstream Irish society (see McPhee, 2005 and Flynn, 2006). This research aims to build on these earlier findings by examining the challenges faced by Muslims in Ireland



in relation to the practice of their religion and by pinpointing perceived barriers to their integration and interaction with the wider Irish society.

This research sets the framework by examining the history of Islam. It focuses on what is suggested are key aspects of Islam that provide necessary background information in order to comprehend and make sense of the situation of Muslims in Ireland today. These factors include the foundation of the religion through Quranic revelations to the Prophet Muhammad, the development of the international Muslim community, the growth of diversity within Islam and historical encounters between Islam and Europe.

The research adopts a phenomenological approach and uses qualitative methods of data collection. Twenty-one interviews have been conducted with participants that include men and women from a range of countries and backgrounds, religious leaders and laypersons, refugees, first and second generation immigrants, converts, city dwellers, town dwellers and Muslims belonging to different sects and religious organisations. The interviews have been recorded with the permission of the participants, then transcribed, coded and analysed to identify key themes and issues.

Findings would support the suggestion by Fokas (2007) that trends in the study of Islam in Europe which veer towards cultural differentialism and monist conceptions of identity are insufficient in light of the subtle shades of diversity present within the Muslim population. Whilst identity is an important issue, this research suggests that the identities of Muslims in Ireland cannot be compartmentalized into simplified categories relating to

religion and instead are complex and multi-layered and based on levels that include loyalties, beliefs, backgrounds, nationalities and experiences. McPhee (2005: 10) suggests that religion amongst Muslims in Ireland has become ‘the affiliation that connects individuals from disparate social and cultural backgrounds’. This research supports this finding but also suggests that underlying this apparent unity are numerous strands of diversification as well as internal tensions. This diversity results in multiple stances towards, and diverse experiences of, religion, religious practice and social integration.

The study has found that Muslims living in Ireland face significant challenges in relation to the practice of their religion and in relation to their interaction and integration with the wider Irish society. It has found that the Muslim population has adapted in a variety of ways to Irish structures and culture in order to facilitate the practice of their religion and their adherence to religiously prescribed laws. It has also found that challenges in relation to integration are prevalent and that in order for these to be overcome significant efforts must be made on the part of both Muslims and non-Muslims living in Ireland to break the barriers that inhibit their integration. It suggests that the most effective way to achieve this aim is through education, interaction and dialogue.

## Value relevance of research

The German philosopher Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936) has suggested that social scientists follow the criteria of value relevance for deciding what subject areas should be studied. This principle means that the object or concept of a study should be relevant to

the society under investigation and connect with the societies' cultural values therefore having meaning for members of that culture or society (Smith, 1998: 145). The German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) also advocated the criteria of value relevance, adopting the view that social research should be relevant to the problems of the day (cited in Smith, 1998: 173). A study of Islam in Ireland is relevant to Irish society and Irish cultural values as well as to contemporary global issues relating to identity, integration and migration. This is because Islam has a growing presence in Ireland as well as in most countries and societies across the world.

Ninian Smart (1973: 7) points out that the study of religion is hugely important because of the ongoing relevance of religion in the landscape of human life. Smart suggests that a 'grasp of the meaning and genesis of religions is crucial to a number of areas of inquiry' including strands within sociology, psychology, anthropology and the history of ideas. Understanding the experiences of a religious group in any particular society is therefore crucial to understanding the social landscape of which they are a part.

The growing presence of Islam in Ireland means it plays an increasingly visible role in the patchwork of religions that make up Irish society. An understanding of Islam in Ireland is therefore necessary because religions and religious identities inform a society's values and cultures. Huntington (1997: 66) goes so far as to suggest that 'religion is a central, perhaps *the* central, force that motivates and mobilizes people' in the modern world. Whilst Seidman (cited in May, 2001: 17), suggests that religion, which was once

called one of the 'repressed rivals' of science, is now returning to take its revenge and is becoming more and more important in the world.

The recent influx of growing numbers of Muslim immigrants to the west has ramifications for western societies as new social, educational and legal issues have emerged as a result of the presence of Islam and as a result of Muslim attempts to practice their faith (Smith, 2002: 5). Esposito (2005: xvi) suggests that in order to understand the world in which we live, it is necessary to understand Islam as this is 'a prerequisite for an appreciation of our theologically interconnected and historically intertwined Judaeo-Christian-Islamic heritage'. Understanding Islam therefore and its presence and practice in Ireland as well as the experiences of Muslims in Ireland is necessary for a complete understanding of the contemporary world and contemporary Irish society.

## Background

The researcher's interest in Islam was ignited during her undergraduate studies in sociology and religious studies. Following her degree, a career in radio broadcasting offered her scope to pursue her interest further and in 2006 she received funding from the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland to produce a four-part series of radio programmes about Islam. The programmes enabled a trip to Pakistan which further fuelled her interest in the area. Following completion of the programmes which were broadcast on Waterford Local Radio in the summer of 2006 she applied for a Strand One scholarship offered by Waterford Institute of Technology to support an MA through research on the topic. She

was awarded the scholarship and this invaluable opportunity has afforded her the chance to embark on full-time research on the subject in an academic setting.

## Chapters' outline

**Chapter two** provides a brief history of Islam and shows how aspects of the early development of the religion continue to inform the lives of Muslims in contemporary societies. It looks at unity and diversity within the religion and takes a look at the five pillars of the faith as these form the core of Islamic religious practice. The chapter goes on to examine the early spread of Islam into diverse geographical areas and points out that historical encounters between Islam and Europe continue to inform European and Irish perceptions of Muslims and Muslim perceptions of Europeans. The chapter moves on to look at the history of Islam in Ireland and gives a breakdown of some of the key demographics of the Irish Muslim population.

**Chapter three** begins by looking at the various ways in which Muslims deal with living in non-Muslim countries and examines the concepts of adaptation and integration. It goes on to look Ireland's national policy on integration and explores the potential implications of the dominance of the Catholic Church in Ireland for what is becoming an increasingly pluralist society. The chapter then goes on to examine meta-narratives operating in contemporary Western societies in relation to Islam and Muslims and examines how portrayals of Islam in the media impacts upon the lives of Muslims living in Europe today.

**Chapter four** looks at the methodological considerations of the research. It explains the philosophical positions of the researcher and shows how these informed the research design and method. It also looks at different ways to approach the study of religion and examines the phenomenological approach which is being utilized in this project. The chapter goes on to look at the research method, case study design, research questions, and sampling before taking a more detailed look at the interview techniques adopted for the research.

**Chapter five** focuses on unity and diversity amongst the Muslim population in Ireland. It examines participants' perspectives on this diversity and also explores diversity in relation to religious belief, reasons for immigration, impressions of Ireland, views on militancy and perceptions of integration. The chapter also examines the primary social networks of Muslims living in Ireland and explores varying degrees of integration present amongst the Muslim population as well as looking at participants' concerns regarding the implications of a lack of an integration policy for Ireland and for the Muslim population.

**Chapter six** examines the challenges that Muslims living in Ireland face in relation to the practice of their religion and explores how Muslims adapt to Irish society and culture in order to facilitate religious practice and adherence to religiously prescribed rules. The chapter pays particular attention to the challenges Muslims face in trying to find a public place of prayer suitable for their religious requirements and on the challenges faced once premises has been secured. It also goes on to look at challenges relating to law, food and drink, dress codes, burial, marriage, financial issues and education.

**Chapter seven** focuses on the challenges faced by Muslims in Ireland in relation to social interactions and integration with the wider non-Muslim Irish society. It focuses particularly on experiences of discrimination which participants felt were often linked to misunderstandings about Islam that they felt were fuelled by misrepresentations in the media. It also examines the impact of militant activities carried out by Muslims in other parts of the world on social relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims in Ireland. The chapter also explores the impact of Islamic prohibitions and rules on interactions with non-Muslims and examines the impact of peer pressure and an apparent apathy on the part of Irish non-Muslims to get to know their Muslim neighbours.

**Chapter eight** links together the various strands of this research. The literature review and the research findings are drawn together to present a conclusion and a comprehensive summary of the main points relating to the experiences and challenges faced by Muslims living in Ireland. It points out that Muslims living in Ireland face a wide range of challenges in relation to the practice of their religion and their interaction with the wider non-Muslim society. Whilst challenges relating to religious practice are overcome through adaptation, challenges to integration require a concerted effort on the part of both Muslims and non-Muslims living in Ireland in order for them to be overcome. It suggests that the primary vehicle for overcoming these challenges is education and increased interaction between both groups. It also suggests potential areas for further research.

## Chapter 2: Islam – history, beliefs, practices

To be Muslim, anywhere in the world, means feeling and developing this sense of belonging to the *umma* as if one were an organ in an enormous body.

The Prophet said: ‘The *umma* is one body; if one of its members is sick, the whole body experiences the fever and the affliction.’

(Ramadan, 2004: 90)

The primary aim of this research is to explore the challenges that Muslims living in Ireland face in relation to the practice of their religion and in relation to their interaction and integration with the wider non-Muslim Irish society. However, a study of Muslims in Ireland cannot be undertaken in a vacuum. Indeed, in order to understand the Muslim experience in any country, due consideration must be given to key events in the history and development of Islam as these not only provide the cornerstones for understanding religious beliefs and practices but they also inform and contribute to ideological worldviews as well as influence relationships both within the religion and between Muslims and people of other faiths. This chapter explores the history, practices and beliefs of Islam, the history of Islam in Ireland and key demographics relating to the Irish Muslim population. This background information is necessary to set the context for the research and to provide basic knowledge about Islam for the general reader.



The Quranic revelations received by Muhammad in seventh century Arabia provide the foundations for Islamic faith and practice. The importance of this early period can be illustrated by the fact that the period of Muhammad and his early companions continues to provide a reference point for Islamic revival and reform movements across the world (Esposito, 2005: 38). It is suggested however, that in addition to the Quranic revelations and example of the Prophet, there are four key factors that must be taken into consideration for the study of Muslim experience in Ireland:

1. The establishment of the Islamic community that transcended tribal bonds and geographical boundaries.
2. Divisions within Islam (sects, schools of law, revivalist and reform movements).
3. Historical encounters between Islam and Europe.
4. The incorporation within Islam of aspects of surrounding cultures.

All four of these factors combine in a complex pattern to influence and affect Muslim experiences in Ireland. Firstly, the awareness of belonging to a worldwide faith community has led to the development of a trans-national network of communications and support amongst the international Muslim community. It has also contributed to aspects of Muslim identity that transcend national boundaries. Secondly, as Fokas (2007: 2) points out, the diversity within Islam means that the too-often simplified dichotomous representations of Muslims as either 'liberal' or 'traditional' is insufficient for an understanding of Muslim experiences in Europe. Thirdly, historical encounters between Islam and Europe have contributed to, and fuelled, a predominant media discourse of

Islam as enemy and this has implications for Muslim experiences in Ireland. It has also contributed to a growth of Islamophobic incidents. Fourthly, Islam has throughout its history incorporated aspects of surrounding cultures. This indicates that acculturation is a natural development resulting from the migration of Islam into new social and cultural *milieus*. This ties in with the finding that Muslim experiences in Ireland, whilst sharing a number of commonalities with other European countries, are in fact unique and that a number of elements contribute to the distinctive development of Islam in Ireland.

## Islam – the beginnings

The story of Islam begins in the desert climate of the Arabian Peninsula around 570CE with the birth of a boy called Muhammad ibn Abdullah. The boy was orphaned from a young age and was brought up in the care of his grandfather and later, his uncle Abu Talib in the city of Mecca.

Mecca at that time was an illustrious city at the centre of a prosperous caravan trade route that ran between Southern Arabia and the Mediterranean countries. It was also a sacred city and home to the Kaba, a cube shaped shrine which was the focus of idol worship within Arabia. Every year, a four month truce between all the warring tribes enabled pilgrimages to the shrine and during these months Mecca became the economic and religious hub of the peninsula. Although the Kaba housed three hundred and sixty idols, there was a shared belief in the supreme high god known as al-Lah and there were hundreds of minor deities including goddesses, interestingly one of whom was called al-Lat.

When Muhammad was still young he helped his uncle Abu Talib with his trade and caravans. He built up a reputation as a person of high moral conduct and was called 'al-Amin' (the trustworthy). A twice-widowed woman named Khadijah asked Muhammad to lead her caravan to Syria. He did so successfully and afterwards she offered herself to him in marriage. She was forty. He was just twenty-five. They married and she was to be his only wife for the next twenty-five years.

When Muhammad was thirty five he developed the habit of retreating to Mount Hira, a few miles north of Mecca, to meditate and contemplate the meaning of life. It was here during the month of Ramadan when he was aged forty that he received a message from God that was brought to him by the Angel Gabriel who commanded him to 'recite'. This was the first of many revelations to Muhammad that were to continue over the next twenty-two years.

Muhammad's wife Khadijah became the first to believe that Muhammad was a messenger of God. Other early believers included his cousin Ali, his future father-in-law and first caliph Abu Bakr, and his servant Zayed. Muhammad however, did not set out to found a new religion. He was calling on people for 'islam', meaning total submission, to Allah. He believed he was the 'seal of the prophets' or the last in the line of prophets that had begun with Adam and that had included Abraham, Moses and Jesus. He believed that Jews and Christians had distorted God's original revelation and that Islam was the restoration of the true faith (Esposito, 2005: 12).

As Muhammad received the revelations he memorized them and passed them on to his followers who memorized them and they were then recorded in the Quran. The Quran included only the words Muhammad had received from God in revelations and the divine inspiration of the Quran 'is an article of faith of all Muslims and has seldom been questioned' (Gibb, 1988: 168). The words that Muhammad spoke that were not revelations were recorded separately in the *hadith* (written reports about the *sunnah* or actions and sayings of the Prophet). Both the Quran and the *hadith* play an important role in the lives of Muslims living in Ireland as it is from these sources that Muslims establish what is perceived to be the correct modes of living.

## Emigration

From the beginning, people in Mecca were hostile to Muhammad's message of 'one God' as it threatened the city's religious prestige which was based on polytheistic worship. Muhammad's message could also destroy the economy of Mecca that depended for a large part upon the great tribal pilgrimages to the Kaba. The ruling Umayyad clan of the Quraysh were particularly opposed to Muhammad's message as his claim of prophetic authority and leadership posed a threat to their political authority, as did the message that 'all true believers belonged to a single universal community (*ummah*) that transcended tribal bonds' (Esposito, 2005: 8).

In 619 Muhammad's wife Khadijah and his uncle and protector Abu Talib both died and opposition to Muhammad's message grew. Verbal attacks were increasing in intensity

and his followers were often subject to active persecution. In 622 Muhammad and his followers emigrated to the city of Yathrib around two hundred miles north of Mecca. This migration was called the *hijrah* and Yathrib soon became known as Medina, short for Medinat al-Nabi, ‘the city of the Prophet’. The importance of the *hijrah* is marked by the fact that the Islamic calendar begins from this date. *Hijrah* or emigration is also one of the strategies that the Quran sanctions for Muslims who wish to live in accordance with Islamic ideals but who live in countries ruled by non-Muslims.

### The *ummah*

It was here in Medina that the first Muslim community (*ummah*) was created and where religious and political authority were intertwined in the leadership of Muhammad. Up to this point it was tribal bonds that had constituted the main ties within Arabian society but from this date onwards the primary identity of the Muslim community was religious rather than tribal (Esposito, 2005: 9). The religion now developed hand in hand with the development of state institutions including those relating to law and social services. Islam, from this early date, encompassed both a faith and a sociopolitical system where ‘secular’ and ‘sacred’ spheres were intertwined.

The importance of the concept of the *ummah* has persisted over the centuries. Indeed, modern forms of communication and transportation facilitate strengthening links between Muslim communities across the globe as can be illustrated by reference to the response of Muslims around the world following the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005. Demonstrations

were held in Pakistan in mid-November but the global scale of the controversy did not occur until February 2006 following a speech by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi which was broadcast across the world. Sheikh Qaradawi, who is from Egypt, lives in Qatar and is President of the European Council for Fatwa and Research which has its headquarters in Ireland said ‘the *ummah* must rage in anger’ over the cartoons and ‘must never accept the degradation of our religion’ (cited in Klausen, 2005: vii). It is not clear if the events that occurred in the following weeks were directly linked to Sheikh Qaradawi’s speech but by six weeks later 250 people had died in riots around the world as protests took place in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and Danish consulates in Beirut and Damascus were burned down. This illustrates both the continued importance of the *ummah* as well as the globalised links between Muslims around the world.

## Islamic expansion

The years after the *hijrah* saw a series of battles between the Muslims and the Meccans. Some resulted in victories but there were also defeats. Eventually, in 630, Muhammad conquered Mecca and destroyed idolatry at the Kaba. He died in Medina just two years later by which time the whole of Arabia was united under Islam. The caliphs became his successors. The first four caliphs – Abu Bakr, Umar Ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan and Ali ibn Abi Talib were all companions of the prophet and they came to be known as the Rightly Guided Caliphs.

The early period of Muhammad and the first four caliphs is regarded within Sunni Islam as the normative period and it ‘provides the idealized past to which Muslims have looked

back for inspiration and guidance, a time to be remembered and emulated' (Esposito, 2005: 36). This ideal is, however, significantly at odds with the reality of Muslim life in non-Muslim countries such as Ireland where religious and political power are contained in very distinct entities. The period of the early companions also provides a reference point for contemporary revival and reform movements (Esposito, 2005: 38).

The caliphate under the Rightly Guided Caliphs (632-661), the Umayyad's (661-750) and the Abbasids (750-1258) saw the establishment of an Islamic Empire that spread from Spain to Russia across North Africa, the Balkans and the subcontinent of India as well as Turkey, Persia, Caucasus and parts of South East Asia. In the conquered territories Jews and Christians were protected minorities (*dhimmi*s) upon payment of a special tax called the *jizya* and had the right of religious freedom and some autonomy.

As they moved into new lands, Muslim conquerors had to find ways to deal with the religions, cultures and governments that were already in place in the new territories. The early missionaries brought with them a new way of life that encompassed individual faith as well as a political and social order but they often adopted the bureaucracy and government that were already in place in the conquered territories and in their encounter with new cultures often adopted what was considered for the overall good in a culture and it was integrated into the local Islamic sphere (Ramadan, 2004: 36). This led to growing diversity within the Islamic empire.

The expansion and consolidation of Islamic governance and power continued throughout the coming centuries and Islamic states maintained a dominant global force with vast empires that dominated the world. Following the defeat of the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad by invading Mongols in 1258 a string of sultanates was established each of which was ruled by a sultan. Amidst these sultanates three Islamic empires emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: the Persian Safavid empire (1501-1722) centred in Isfahan in modern day Iran, the Mughal empire (1520-1857) with its capital in Delhi in the Indian subcontinent and the Ottoman Turkish empire which lasted up until the twentieth century with its capital at Istanbul.

## Decline

By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a shift in power and 'political disintegration and social and moral decline once more gripped much of the Muslim world' (Esposito, 2005: 115). Many Islamic states were faced with the increasing power of Western European countries and with colonization. This, coupled with the spread of Western technology and modernization into Islamic lands, resulted in a decrease of Muslim power. By 1920 Afghanistan, Turkey, Persia, Central Arabia, Northern Yemen and the Hejaz were the only remaining Muslim states. The rest were under colonial rule or under some form of European protection (Ruthven, 2006: 289)

The power of the caliphate which had existed in various forms since the death of Muhammad had always waxed and waned but until the twentieth century it provided an underlying political unity for the worldwide Islamic community. However, in World War



I, Turkey sided with Germany and their defeat led to the break up of the caliphate in Turkey in 1924.

Despite the break up of the caliphate, Islam has continued to grow and it is now the second largest world religion with hundreds of millions of Muslims scattered in various concentrations in countries throughout the world. At the turn of the millennium there was an estimated 5.6 million Muslims living in Europe and 7.8 million in the U.S.

(Armstrong, 2000: 149). As stated previously, there were also almost 33,000 Muslims recorded as living in Ireland in 2006 (Census 2006).

## Divisions within Islam

Adherents of all religions may claim that their religion is a unified, unchanging and timeless but change is in fact a constant and observable factor in all religions (Bowman, Herbert and Mumm, 2001: 15) and Islam is no exception. There have been divisions and subdivisions present in Islam from the first decades of its existence. These internal diversities are represented to some degree in all countries with a Muslim population, including Ireland.

The earliest division in Islam occurred in the seventh century when two opposing groups of Muslims disagreed about who should be caliph. Shii Muslims believed that leadership of the community should have stayed in Muhammad's family and that the Prophet had chosen Ali to be the leader of the *ummah*. When Ali eventually became the fourth caliph there were two civil wars and when the caliphate was taken over by the Umayyad clan

who moved the headquarters of the caliph to Damascus, Shii Muslims rejected the caliphs in favour of Imams who were descended from the Prophet through his daughter Fatima who was married to Ali. However, the Shii succession of Imams ended in the ninth century. Ayatollahs are now seen as the spiritual guides within Shii Islam (Wolffe, 1993: 138).

The Shii, who are further subdivided, share the Quran and some traditions with Sunnis. However, they have their own interpretation of the Quran, their own traditional books and their own reading of history from an early date (Cragg, 1997: 49). Shiis also differ from Sunnis in their veneration of Imams and saints and they have a more detailed ritual calendar.

While Shii Muslims followed the descendents of Ali, Sunni Muslims followed the Umayyad and then the Abbasid caliphs. The term Sunni comes from *sunnah* or 'customs' and refers to the fact that Sunni Muslims claim to follow the customs or traditions of the Prophet which are recorded in the *ahadith* (singular, *hadith*) and practiced through Sharia which is believed to be divine law.

The complex process of determining what constituted laws within Islam was worked out by interpretation, analogy and the consensus of the community and this generated four main law schools among Sunni Muslims:

- Hanafi
- Maliki

- Shafii
- Hanbali

These four schools are represented in varying degrees amongst Muslims around the world. Shii Muslims have their own law schools.

Umayyad rule spawned dissatisfaction amongst many Muslims who felt that the spread of Islam into foreign territories had also resulted in the adoption of too many foreign practices as well as growing corruption and abuse of power amongst the rulers. This context saw the growth of two Islamic movements or institutions:

- the *ulama* or religious scholars
- the Sufis (mystics)

The *ulama* are a main branch of leadership within Islam. They are made up of religious scholars and experts in religious law (Sharia). The *ulama* felt that God's will should be universal and should be more uniform and also that Islam must 'permeate every area of life' including Umayyad practice and law (Esposito, 2005: 49).

The name of the movement Sufism comes from the type of wool garment (*suf*) worn by the early mystics. They sought spiritual experiences through bodily discipline, the renunciation of worldly concerns and mystical intuition. Sufi mysticism became a popular religious movement within both Sunni and Shii Islam. Sufis often attempt to reach states of ecstasy by using music, dancing, singing and poetry. They also venerate or

worship saints who are seen as intercessors. Sufi leaders are called *shaykhs* (also known as *pirs* or dervishes) and they constitute another main branch of leadership within Islam.

In addition to diversity within Islam in relation to sects, law schools, religious leaders and cultural differences based on geographical locations, recent centuries have seen the development of a number of diverse schools of thought that developed as Muslims sought ways to adapt to colonialism and modernity. Esposito (2005) identifies three main responses:

- Secular adaptation or secular modernism - the belief that public life should be modeled on European ideas. Secularists looked on the West uncritically.
- Religiously motivated rejectionism and traditionalism which involved a withdrawal from public life, isolation, non-co-operation and rejection (leading to either *hijrah* or *jihad*). Traditionalists shunned the west. Their position was the majority stance.
- Islamic modernism or reform which involved linking the Islamic past and the modern present through reinterpretation and a selective adaptation of Western ideas.

These stances have generated numerous religious organizations and movements which have attracted millions of followers and have global networks. Many of these movements are represented in European contexts including Ireland. As Gilliat-Ray (2002: 187) points out, this means that ‘schools of thought and law that were previously separated by vast

geographical distances are now brought together and contested by different ethnic and cultural groups within Muslim minority communities.’

The diversity within Islam means that there is disagreement over what constitutes being a Muslim. Ruthven points out that the words ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ are disputed territory everywhere with some Muslims even calling other Muslims infidels (Ruthven, 1997: 4). For example, the Ahmadiyya movement founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839-1908) in India, has ‘been particularly subject to the hostility of other groups, which usually deny their claim to be Muslims at all’ (Wolffe, 1993: 140-1). They too have a presence in Ireland.

Despite the diversity present within Islam, Nielsen (2007: 44) notes that since 9/11 there has been a tendency in the west for dichotomous views about Muslims. This involves a view where Muslims are divided into moderates or liberals and conservatives or fundamentalists. As Fokas (2007: 2) points out, however, such simplistic divisions are insufficient to convey the complex array of diversity present within Muslim populations and a more nuanced approach is required, an approach which takes many other factors into consideration. The approach adopted in this study is to focus on Muslim perceptions of diversity within the Muslim population of Ireland rather than to impose categories or dichotomous views from an outsider perspective. As will be illustrated in the findings, there are many different ways to conceive of this diversity.

## The five pillars of Islam

Despite the internal diversity and the many divisions within the worldwide Islamic community, there are also common threads that unite the *ummah* including the belief in the Quran as the divine word of God as revealed through the Prophet Muhammad and their sense of submission to God which is reinforced through the practice of ‘the Pillars of the Faith’, which are regarded as the duties of a Muslim:

1. *Shahadah* – the profession of faith or witness. This is the fundamental statement of Islamic belief: ‘There is no god but God [Allah] and Muhammad is the messenger of God’. This is recited by any person wishing to convert to Islam as part of the process of conversion. It is also recited through the day when the *muezzin* calls people to pray. It affirms the monotheism of Islam and the prophetic nature of Muhammad.
2. *Salat* - prayer. Muslims are called to prayer five times a day – at daybreak, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and evening. Prayer is preceded by ablutions of the exposed parts of the body. Muslims face Mecca when they are praying and each mosque has a niche (*mihrab*) to mark the direction (*qibla*) of Mecca . The prayer consists of seven bodily movements with recitations which are collectively called a *raka*. The number of *raka* performed varies from two to four according to the time of prayer. Men are obliged to attend congregational prayer at noon on Fridays and women who have the choice to attend, are usually separated from the men by a curtain or in a separate room or balcony. Shii have a slightly different call to prayer and have a special ritual of ablution.

3. *Zakat* - alms giving. Muslims are obliged to contribute a certain amount of money every year to help improve the social welfare of their community. The amount is calculated at usually one fortieth (2.5 percent) of annual revenue and the money collected is used to support the poor, orphans and widows and to help spread Islam.
4. *Sawm* - fasting. Muslims are obliged to fast during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. All healthy adult Muslims over the age of twelve are required to abstain completely from food, drink and sexual activity from dawn to sunset. The Islamic calendar is lunar based which means the month of Ramadan moves through all the seasons of the year in cycles of approximately 33 years. The end of Ramadan is marked with the celebration of the breaking of the fast *Id al-Fitr*.
5. *Hajj* – pilgrimage. Every adult who is physically and financially able is expected to perform the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime. The pilgrimage takes place during the twelfth month of the Muslim lunar calendar - Dhu al-Hijja – and ceremonies last almost one week. It is estimated that around two million people have been going on *hajj* to Mecca in recent years. The King Abdul Aziz International Airport near Jeddah which deals with many of the pilgrims has the world's largest fabric structure which was made to cope with the growing numbers of pilgrims (Ruthven, 2006: 1). People who have undertaken the pilgrimage are given the name al-Hajj or Hajji.

Officially there are five pillars in Islam but some Muslims believe that there is a sixth pillar or obligation. This is *jihad* – struggle – and it refers to the duty ‘to strive in God’s path’ in order to defend the community against external and internal enemies. Some call this Holy War. It refers to the obligation to realize God’s will, live virtuous lives and extend the Islamic community. Although *jihad* is not supposed to include aggressive warfare, this has happened at various stages in the history of Islam including amongst early extremists and more recent and contemporary groups in Egypt, Lebanon, the Gulf states and Indonesia (Esposito, 2005: 93).

The five pillars of Islam reinforce the sense of solidarity felt between Muslims who believe themselves to be part of the worldwide Muslim community. However, there are numerous shades of commitment to these religious duties or practices amongst Muslims all over the world (Wolffe, 1993: 143). Observance of the five pillars can pose challenges for Muslims living in non-Muslim countries such as Ireland where there may be a lack of structures in place in which to facilitate their observance.

## Islam and Europe – early encounters

Although Ireland is positioned on the western edge of Europe, it is a country whose identity is embedded in the shared European Judeo-Christian heritage. Ireland’s social, cultural, political and economic make-up is inseparable to that of the rest of Europe particularly since Ireland joined the European Union in 1973. Muslim experiences in Ireland must be understood against the European backdrop as this has informed Muslim perceptions of Ireland and Irish perceptions of Islam.



Muslims have had a presence in Europe almost as far back as the birth of Islam and those early contacts continue to inform Muslim perceptions of Europe and European perceptions of Islam. Early exchanges were often ones of confrontation and Europe's relationship with Islam must be seen against this historical backdrop that began with the expansion of Islam, continued with the Crusades and European colonialism and has lasted until the present day in the form of neoimperialism in the Middle East (Esposito, 2005: 204-205). These events, particularly colonialism, have also influenced recent patterns of immigration to various European nation states.

Although Islamic rule was first consolidated in the Arabian peninsula and surrounding areas, within one hundred years of Muhammad's death it had spread into Europe. The Umayyad era (661-750) saw Muslims capturing Spain and Portugal and Muslims also marched across Europe and into France where they were stopped by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours in 733. The early spread of Islam into Europe meant that between the eighth and fifteenth centuries, Muslims ruled Spain and some parts of southern Italy and southern France. During this time Muslims also lived as minorities in countries under Christian rule (Esposito, 2005: 205).

By the eleventh century Europe turned towards a struggle against Islam and embarked on a series of Crusades to Jerusalem (1095-1453). In 1099 the Crusaders attacked Jerusalem and established Christian rule in the Holy Land. Muslims recaptured Jerusalem in 1187 under Salah al-Din (Saladin) but the Crusades continued up until the fifteenth century.

Their impact upon relations between Christians and Islam has been enduring. Smith (2002: 3) suggests that the Crusades created a 'Crusader and anti-Crusader' mentality that has 'influenced attitudes of the Christian West and the Islamic East toward each other for centuries'. The enduring legacy of the Crusades is evidenced by the fact that Western soldiers involved in military operations against Iraq are sometimes called crusaders whilst the 1991 Gulf War was perceived by many as a revival of the Crusades (Mitri, 2007: 28-29). The American president, George Bush used the word 'crusade' to refer to the 'war against terrorism'. Goody (2004: 1) suggests that this was thereby defining it as a war against Islam.

The eleventh century also saw the attempt of Christians to reconquer Spain (between 1000-1492), Italy and Sicily (1061). In Eastern Europe, Constantinople came under Turkish Muslim rule in 1453 and became the city that bridged Europe and Asia. Muslim excursions did continue into Europe but not with the success of previous centuries and the Ottoman Empire with its capital at Istanbul formed the borders between the Christian and Muslim civilisations that have lasted up to the present day (Esposito, 2005: 61). By the turn of the sixteenth century, during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain, Muslims were 'expelled almost entirely from the West' (Smith, 2002: 3). Fokas (2007: 4) points out that images relating to these historical events continue to have a powerful impact in the imaginations of many Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe. Indeed conceptions of Europe as Christian have been shaped 'in relation to the Ottoman Muslim 'other' (Fokas, 2007: 14).

These encounters between Europe and Islam reek of mutual suspicion, where phases of domination and subordination were weaved into the quest for power and conquest. This historical background has fed into modern discourses of Islam as enemy and has often overshadowed the positive exchanges such as the borrowing of Western Christians from Islamic science, philosophy, medicine, and the arts during the tenth to fifteenth centuries (Smith, 2002: 3, Mitri: 2007: 17).

## Europe and Islam – the later years

By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries western European colonial powers had arrived in the Middle East and Islamic lands were divided up into new political entities. This colonialist legacy ‘continues as a powerful force affecting the relationship between Muslims and citizens of Europe and America’ (Smith, 2002: 3).

In the twentieth century the nature of interaction between Islam and Europe changed. Muslims started to arrive in Europe in large numbers but their motivations were hugely different and had changed from the quest to conquer to economic and political reasons, often in an attempt to find work, to escape persecution or to find religious freedom (Smith, 2002).

Islam has now become one of the fastest growing religions in Europe and traditionally Christian Europe is now home to around 15 million Muslims (Legrain, 2007: 11). Today, Muslims in Europe are made up of first, second and third generation immigrants and their

relatively new presence is providing an array of challenges for both Muslims and their Western hosts (Smith, 2002: 3).

The growth of Islam on a global scale and its extension into areas previously dominated by Christianity (or other religions) means that the perceived historical global boundaries of religions have become obsolete. In the past the geographical centres of Islam were the Middle East as well as parts of Africa and Asia. These centres remain important but Islam has spread its wings to new and diverse territories where it now has a permanent and growing presence. These new centres of growth include Europe and America. Also, traditional Catholic bastions such as Ireland and Italy now have growing Muslim populations.

The spread of Islam beyond its traditional territories into Europe and to areas right across the world has implications for the understanding of Islam in Ireland. This is primarily because the Muslim sense of belonging to the *ummah* transcends national boundaries and links Muslims all over the globe. Sacks (2007: 233) suggests that new technologies which have been harnessed to strengthen communication across global boundaries have resulted in the fact that localised conflicts in the contemporary world have become contagious with the potential to spread into 'epidemics'. This means that events that occur to Muslims on one side of the world may and do have ramifications for Muslims living on the other side of the world including Ireland.

The global span and spread of Islam into new geographical areas has also resulted in a growing diversity amongst the worldwide Islamic community which is made up of many different nationalities with different customs, dress and ways of life. These divisions have implications for an understanding of Islam in any contemporary society where Muslims live and this diversity influences internal interactions amongst the Muslim population as well as their interactions with the wider society.

At the turn of the twenty-first century Muslims constituted the largest religious minority in Western Europe and made up almost three percent of the total population of Europe with over twelve million Muslims living in the major countries of the European Union. There are particularly high numbers in France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Greece where Muslims make up make up over four percent of the populations (Cesari, 2004: 9).

It is important to note that due to space and time limitations, this study focuses particularly on the Muslim experience in Europe rather than the United States. Although both of these geographical areas constitute part of what is termed 'Western civilisation' their experiences of Islam is markedly different. Whilst the growth of the Muslim population in Europe is largely due to economic push and pull factors as well as colonial connections, in America the growth has centred around factors relating to education and the growth of Islam amongst the African American community (Esposito, 2005: 205). It is estimated that almost half the Muslims in America are converts and most of these are from the African American community (Cesari, 2004: 11). Also, Muslim immigrants to

the US began arriving in the second half of the nineteenth century whilst significant numbers of Muslims only started arriving in Europe later, particularly after the Second World War (Smith, 2002: 4).

Although Muslims are now present in almost all Western European countries, each country's experience of Islam is markedly different. It is shaped by the country's historical past and is often linked to that country's colonial history. For example, in France there are large numbers of Muslims from North Africa; in Britain there is a link to South Asia, and Germany is linked with Turkey. This is partly because Muslims who emigrated after independence chose the country of their former colonisers as their new destination. The history of Ireland as a colonised rather than colonising country means that the Muslim population in Ireland is particularly diverse as there is no link with one specific country. Nielsen (2007: 38) points out that in Denmark too, the Muslim immigrants were very mixed in their origins.

Despite the fact that most European countries have significant numbers of Muslims from former colonial centres, Cesari (2004: 9) points out that 'the ethnic diversity of European Muslims is striking'. The largest ethnic groupings are Arabs who make up 3.5 million of Europe's 12 million Muslims, Turkish Muslims (2.5 million) and Muslims from the Indian subcontinent (800,000). However, it is impossible to ascertain exact figures as most countries do not include a question on religion in their censuses (Cesari, 2004: 9). These ethnic groups are spread across almost all European countries although in differing ratios.

## Islam in Ireland – early encounters

Muslims first started arriving in Ireland in large numbers in the 1950s when a number of Muslim students came to Ireland to study in Irish universities and institutions. Very little, however, is known about the presence of Islam in Ireland in the first half of the twentieth century and earlier with only sketchy details available of a few recorded incidents of Muslims in Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Skuce, 2006: 58).

Some of the earliest recorded Muslims in Ireland include Dean Mahomet, who was born in 1759 in Patna in India and who came to live in Cork in 1784 where he married a woman from a Protestant Irish gentry family. Around that time another Indian, Abu Talib Khan, arrived in Cork after adverse winds prevented the ship he was traveling on from docking in London (Fisher, 1997: 142-3). There is also a record of the conversion of Turkish merchant called Ibrahim Ben Ali to Christianity in Whitefriar Street in Dublin in 1791 as well as a record of a convert from Mahometanism to Roman Catholicism in the parish baptismal register in Enniscorthy, County Wexford on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 1853 (Skuce, 2006: 58). Another early Muslim resident in Ireland was Mir Alaud Ali, a native of Oudh in India, who was professor of Arabic, Persian and Urdu at Trinity College Dublin from 1861 to 1898. He was married to an English wife and his job in Trinity College was to prepare Dublin graduates seeking employment in the Indian Civil Service (Bari, 2007).

There are a small number of other historical records showing evidence of encounters between Muslims and the Irish people prior to the twentieth century. These include the raids of Moorish pirates along the South Coast of Ireland in the seventeenth century. One of these raids occurred in Baltimore in County Cork in 1631 when two hundred people were captured and the events recounted later in a ballad by Thomas Davis called *The Sack of Baltimore* (Skuce, 2006: 57). Irish involvement in the slave trade is also likely to have resulted in encounters between Irish people and Muslims in Africa (Skuce, 2006: 57). Interactions also resulted from the travels of Irish people to Muslim countries as well as Muslim culture reaching Irish shores. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries some Irish people had personal experiences of Asia as soldiers, traders or travelers, whilst others had built up more exotic images of India from traveling circuses, books, plays and newspapers which ‘all presented India and Muslims as alien curiosities’ (Fisher, 1997: 140).

Cultural encounters include the record of a mob destroying a theatre in Smock Alley in Dublin in 1794 after the play ‘Mahomet’ was performed (Skuce, 2006: 58). There were also plays about Muslims produced in Cork including a translation of Voltaire’s *Mahomet, the Imposter: A Tragedy* staged in 1788 and 1796 which presented the Prophet Muhammad as a religious tyrant, and a series of productions in 1791, 1804 and 1807 of *The Sultan; or, a Peep into the Seraglio* by Isaac Bickerstaff which told the story of an English slave woman who won the attentions of the Sultan, became queen and freed the rest of the harem. Fisher (1997: 141) suggests that ‘this theme of an English Christian



woman converting a Muslim to her 'higher' principles and then marrying him may have seemed to the people of Cork to be relevant to the marriage of Jane and Dean Mahomet.'

Early encounters therefore, between Ireland and Islam were rare and isolated and would have done little to inform Irish people about the religion of Islam. Cultural portrayals of Muslims and Islam went from the exotic to the denigrating and sometimes erupted in controversy. Clearly however, the vast majority of Irish people up to the twentieth century were unfamiliar with Islam or Muslims and portrayals of both were mixed and often conflicting thus indicating that knowledge about both was scant.

## Development of Muslim communities in Ireland

Small numbers of Indian Muslims began to arrive and settle in Northern Ireland in the 1930s and 40s but it was not until the 1950s and 60s that Muslims began to arrive in sizeable numbers in the Republic of Ireland when Muslim medical students came to Dublin to study at the Royal College of Surgeons (Skuce, 2006: 58-9). This first trickle was made up of Muslims from South Africa, India, Malaysia and the Gulf states and they were mostly based in Dublin (Selim, 2005: 26). There were also a few converts to Islam, including one man named Patrick Conway who renamed himself Mohammad Conway (Flynn, 2006: 224).

In the early 1950s, Muslims resident in Dublin met in private homes and rented halls to pray (Flynn, 2006: 224) and the Salvation Army also gave permission to some Muslim students resident in Dublin at the time to use a room for Friday prayers but at this time

there were no resident Muslim clergy (Skuce, 2006: 59). As the number of Muslims continued to rise, a group of students decided to form a committee to organize prayers and lectures and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1959 the first Muslim assembly was held at Koinonia House on Harcourt Street in Dublin (Flynn, 2006: 224). It was attended by just thirty three students. The organization was called the Dublin Islamic Society. This meeting also marked the beginning of regular Friday prayer in Ireland (Flynn, 2006: 224).

As the number of Muslims in Dublin continued to grow over the coming decade, students started to look towards the aim of establishing an Islamic centre. In 1969, a fund-raising campaign was directed towards this initiative (Flynn, 2006: 224). The campaign was focused mainly on parents and relatives of students studying in Ireland but authorities in Kuwait, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Islamic Centres in the UK were also contacted in an effort to raise funds (Selim, 2005a: 26). By 1969, the total Muslim population in Ireland was estimated at around three hundred (Flynn, 2006: 224).

Significant funding was received from the Middle East for the development of an Islamic Centre in Dublin and following the opening of a bank account, donations included (IR)£1,518 from the government of Abu Dhabi and (IR)£17,914.28 from King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. By April 1973, number 7 Harrington Street was the official address of the Muslim Society of Ireland and in October 1974 the society purchased the building for (IR)£10,870 (Flynn, 2006: 224). In August 1976 the Society announced the official

opening of the building as the Mosque of Dublin (Flynn, 2006: 224) and in 1981 the Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs in Kuwait sponsored a full-time Imam for the Mosque.

Within a few years however, the building had become too small for the increasing number of Muslims in Ireland and another fundraising campaign was initiated with a view to purchasing a bigger premises. In 1983, the former Donor Avenue Presbyterian Church on 163 South Circular Road was purchased and subsequently became known as the Dublin City Mosque. Funding for the premises had come from Qatari and Kuwaiti authorities as well as individual donations and from money accrued from the sale of the building at Harrington Street which was sold in 1985 (Selim, 2005a: 26). Foreign funding had implications for the development of the centre as it meant that international links were built up between Muslims in Ireland and Islamic countries and Muslims around the world. Numbers of people attending the mosque continued to increase through the 1980s and in 1985 a balcony was added to the building to cope with the growing numbers. In 1990 the name of the Dublin Islamic Society was changed into the Islamic Foundation of Ireland (I.F.I.) (Selim, 2005a: 26).

Dublin City Mosque is the oldest and most established mosque in Ireland and is the headquarters of the Islamic Foundation of Ireland. The IFI acts as a representative body for all Muslims in Ireland and according to the IFI written constitution every Muslim is an honorary member of the society. In 2006, there were 1,384 registered members of the society (Flynn, 2006: 225). The Foundation runs the mosque and nearby Islamic Centre.

It also owns a shop, which sells *halal* meat and other foods, a restaurant and properties which are rented out to part finance the running of the foundation. Registered membership of the foundation is made up of Muslims from over fourteen nationalities. Plans are underway to further extend the mosque to cope with the growing numbers of Muslims attending the facility (Flynn, 2006: 224).

In its formative days the Muslim population in Ireland was concentrated in Dublin but Muslims are now represented in almost every urban area in the country with smaller numbers of Muslims living in many rural areas. There are vibrant Muslim communities in Cork, Galway, Limerick, Cavan, Ennis, Tralee, Meath and Waterford and there are up to 4,000 Muslims in Northern Ireland (O'Hanlon, 2007: 8).

In 1978, the Galway Islamic Society was established and a house was rented for prayers. In 1981 a house was bought for prayers in Galway city. The Cork Muslim Society was established in 1984 and a house rented for prayers. In 1994 a house was bought in Cork city to be used as a mosque. Outside of Dublin, the only purpose built mosque in Ireland is in the unlikely location of Ballyhaunis in County Mayo. It was here in 1986 that a Pakistani man named Sher Mohammad Rafique built a mosque for his family and for workers at his *halal* meat factory which he set up around ten years earlier on the site of an old abattoir in the town. The factory known as '*Halal Meats*' supplied meat to Islamic markets in Europe and to Islamic countries but the company went bankrupt in the 1990s and the factory was taken into Irish ownership although it still produces *halal* meat (Flynn, 2006: 228).

The Irish economic boom in the 1990s was accompanied by an expansion of Islam in Ireland which continued through the decade with more mosques being established around the country. In 1994, a house was bought in Limerick for Muslims in the mid-South region of Ireland to use as a place of prayer and worship. In 1999 a branch of the Islamic Foundation of Ireland was formed in the city of Waterford and a house rented for prayers and classes.

The purpose built Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland, located in Clonskeagh in South Dublin, was officially opened on November 16<sup>th</sup> 1996 and is one of the largest mosques in Europe, capable of housing over 1,000 worshippers. Significant funding for the project was provided by Sheikh Hamdan Ben Rashid Al-Maktoum, Deputy Governor of Dubai and Minister of Finance and Industry in the United Arab Emirates who sponsored its construction. The Al-Maktoum Foundation now covers the running costs of the centre (Selim, 2005a: 26).

The facilities at the centre include the Muslim National School, the Arab School, the Nurulhuda Quranic School which is dedicated to teaching the Quran and Arabic and a language learning centre for adults where English and Arabic courses are held (Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland, 2002). It also provides a range of cultural activities including publications, public lectures, courses on Islamic awareness, debates about Islam, conferences, exhibitions and seminars. The centre also houses administration offices, the offices of the General Secretariat of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, an

extensive library, a ladies section with study rooms and a nursery, a shop, restaurant, mortuary service, facilities for ablution before prayers, a multi-purpose hall which can be used for sporting or entertainment events, a gymnasium, ten apartments and a guest house for visiting Muslims (Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland, 2002).

There is also one purpose built Shii mosque in Ireland which has a resident Shii Imam. The mosque, which is called the Ahlul-Bayt Islamic Centre or Hussiania, is located in Milltown in South Dublin and it opened in 1996. The beginnings of the centre can be traced back to the 1970s when a small number of Shii Muslims came to Dublin to study at the Royal College of Surgeons. The students hired a premises in the Portobello area of Dublin to meet for prayers and later moved to a building in Rathgar to accommodate the growing numbers (Ahlul Bayt Islamic Centre). The current mosque caters for the Shii community in Ireland estimated at around two thousand persons with most of these from the Middle Eastern states and Pakistan (Flynn, 2006: 227).

Different estimates put the Sunni Muslim population at between 85 and 90 percent of all Muslims in the world today (Esposito, 2005: 2 and Skuce, 2006: 70). The Irish Muslim population mirrors this breakdown with an estimated 90:10 ratio of Sunni to Shii Muslims in Ireland although an exact figure is difficult to ascertain (Skuce, 2006: 70).

There are also a number of makeshift mosques around Dublin which are mainly houses in residential estates in the suburbs or factory spaces rented out for the purposes of congregational prayer (Fitzgerald, 2006). This pattern of makeshift mosques in residential

or rental property is repeated in towns and cities across Ireland. A similar diversity in the type of buildings being used for mosques is apparent in Britain where, although there are a greater number of purpose built mosques than in Ireland, the majority of mosques up to the early 1990s were in back streets, often in converted terraced houses and often ‘an inconspicuous feature of the environment’ (Wolffe, 1993: 148). Wolffe suggests that there were three reasons that Muslims used such premises: firstly, because of limited financial resources, secondly, because of the fragmentation of Muslim communities on sectarian and ethnic lines and thirdly, because of the ‘devotional, cultural and social needs of Muslims’ and the requirement for a place of worship within walking distance (Wolffe, 1993: 148). These three factors can also be used to explain the diversity in the types of buildings being used as mosques in town and cities all over Ireland where makeshift mosques can be found in warehouses, industrial estates and private homes (Fitzgerald, 2006).

In the past fifteen years in Ireland, particularly in Dublin, there has been a proliferation of these types of makeshift mosques in rental residences and premises. According to Flynn (2006: 227) this emergence of new mosques reflected the growing diversity and the dynamic nature of the Muslim community in Dublin and ‘highlights the desire of certain groups and traditions for greater autonomy and independence from the established and existing structures of the Muslim community’.

In Dublin for example, as well as the larger Dublin City Mosque and the mosque at the Islamic Cultural Centre in Clonskeagh, there is a Shii mosque, a mosque for Nigerians,

the Noor Ul Islam centre run by a member of the Deobandi sect, a mosque in Lucan based around the Tablighi Jamaat movement and a mosque run by a member of the Pakistani organization Minhaj Ul Quran in Clonree in West Dublin (Fitzgerald, 2006). A prayer room at Blackpits in Dublin which opened in the late 1990s has a praying community of over 1,000 on Fridays (Flynn, 2006: 226).

Different mosques have been linked to different nationalities or schools of thought, for example the South Circular mosque has been identified by some Muslims as linked with Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities whilst the Clonskeagh mosque has been linked Algerians and Libyans and more broadly with Arab Muslims. More critically, it has also been described by one Muslim as ‘a very narrow Wahhabi’ (McPhee, 2005: 52).

Ireland’s first fully state funded Muslim National School shares the site of the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland. The school began at Islamic Foundation of Ireland on the South Circular Road in 1990 before moving to the ICCI in Clonskeagh in 1993 when it was officially opened by the then President of Ireland, Mary Robinson. The school had opened its doors in September 1990 with forty students but the numbers quickly increased and in January 2003 it moved to its new location in Clonskeagh and in 2006 had 271 pupils from all over Dublin and sixteen teachers with salaries paid by the Department of Education and five part-time Muslim teachers (Flynn, 2006: 230).

There’s also a second Muslim national school in north Dublin. The North Dublin Muslim School is located on the site of St. Joseph’s School for Deaf Boys on the Navan Road. It



opened in September 2001 with three classrooms and three teachers and in 2006 there were 160 students, eight full-time teachers paid by the Department of Education and three part-time Muslim teachers (Flynn, 2006: 230). Plans are underway for a secondary school but Skuce points out that most Irish Muslim pupils currently attend Catholic schools 'generally due to their parents' preference for single sex education' (Skuce, 2006: 61).

In September 2006 the Irish Council of Imams was established. The council represents fourteen Imams from both Sunni and Shii traditions all over Ireland and the chairman is Hussein Halawa from the Islamic Cultural Centre. One of the first moves of the new Council was to agree a date on which Irish Muslims would begin Ramadan in 2006. The Council's aims include: to form a specialized Muslim official body to express Islamic verdicts regarding issues in Ireland, to encourage Muslim integration into Irish society, to collaborate with people of other faiths and to embark on social and educational programmes for Imams (Fitzgerald, 2006 and The Muslim Community in Ireland).

## Muslims in Ireland – principle demographics

Despite the initial slow rate of growth of Islam in Ireland, by the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Islam had become the fastest growing non-Christian religion in Ireland. Between 1991 and 2002 the number of Muslims resident in Ireland increased from 3,875 to 19,147—representing a percentage change of 401% (see Table 2.1). By 2006 the Muslim population had jumped to 32,539. Although the rate of growth had slowed down, as noted already, it was the fastest growing religion in the state after Orthodox Christianity (Census 2006).

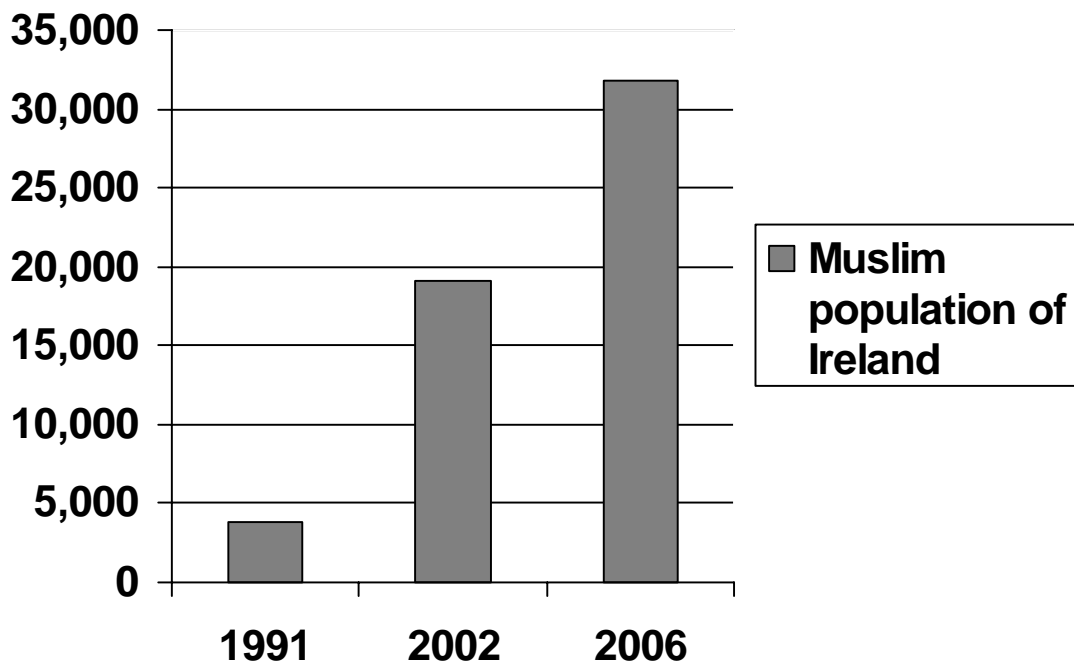


TABLE 2.1: Growth of Muslim population of Ireland 1991-2006 (Source: Central Statistics Office, 2002 & 2006)

The Muslim population of Ireland is concentrated in the Dublin Regional Authority area. In 2006 over half the Muslim population (17,330) was living in this region – over five times more than in the region with the next highest number of Muslims which was the South West (3,330) (Census 2006). This shows a very significant concentration of Muslims in the Dublin area. However, every regional authority in the country now has a Muslim presence with numbers ranging from 1,158 in the Midlands to 3,330 in the South West (Census 2006). Indeed, in 2006 Muslims were recorded in every province, county and city in Ireland and in every town with a population over 5,000 (Census 2006). Interestingly however, not all towns had female Muslims. One town – Dunboyne in Co. Meath - with a population over 5,000 had two male Muslims recorded in the population

but no female Muslims. Throughout the country, Muslims were represented in rural as well as urban areas.

According to the National Action Plan Against Racism, Ireland between 1990 and 2005 had become a country of net inward migration for only the second time since the foundation of the state (Planning for Diversity, 2005). This immigration to Ireland has had a significant impact upon the growth of the Muslim population with non-Irish nationals making up 69% of Muslims resident in Ireland in 2006 (Census 2006) (see Table 2.2).

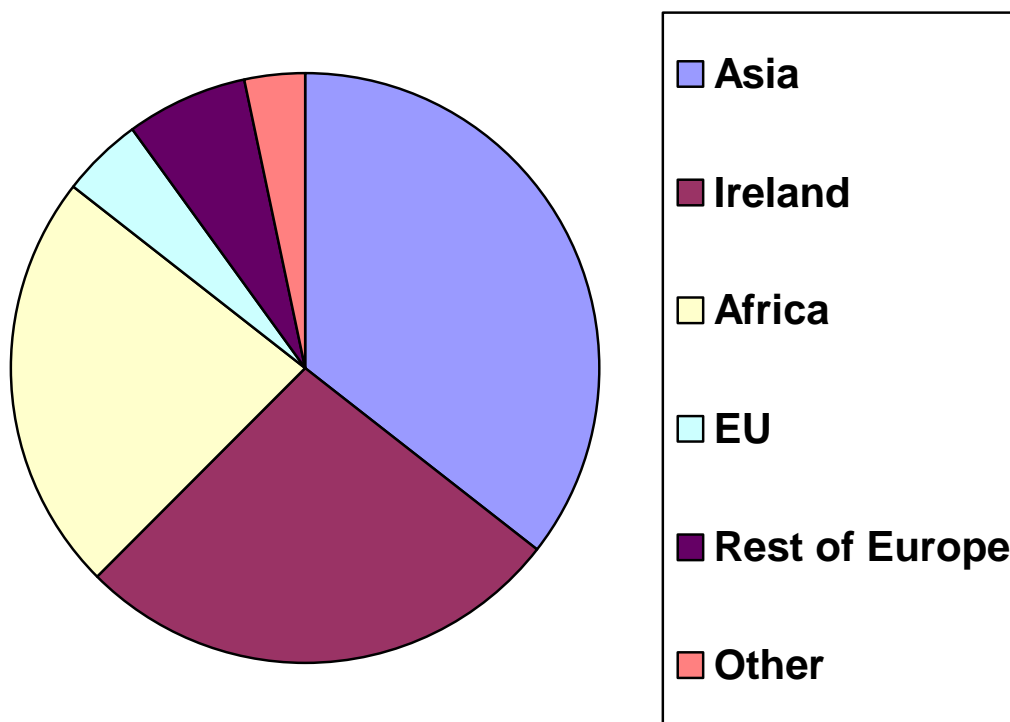


TABLE 2.2: Regions of nationality of Muslims living in Ireland in 2006 (Census 2006)

The nationalities of Muslims living in Ireland is remarkably diverse. The 2006 Census records 50 separate categories of Muslim nationalities in Ireland in 2006. The breakdown of categories includes countries as diverse as the UK (620), Russia (150), New Zealand (2), France (240), Brazil (3), Belgium (28), Malaysia (1,284), Canada (42), China (53), Italy (24), Portugal (19), Sweden (28), South Africa (148), India (304) and the Philippines (69) (Census 2006). The largest nationality represented amongst the Muslim population in Ireland in 2006 was Irish (9,761). This figure would include Irish born Muslims, Irish converts and Muslim migrants who have been granted citizenship. It has been estimated that there are about ten Irish converts to Islam a year (Fitzgerald, 2006). The regions where most Muslim migrants in Ireland have come from are Asia (10,649) and Africa (6,909) and the largest non-Irish nationalities represented amongst the Muslim population are Pakistan (4,863) and Nigeria (1,990) (Census 2006).

Another feature of the Muslim population in Ireland is its relative youth. In 2006, 92 percent of the Muslim population in Ireland was aged under 44, while just 67 percent of the Irish population as a whole was in this age bracket. In the same year only one percent of the Muslim population was aged over 60 compared to 15 percent of the overall Irish population. The largest age group represented amongst the Irish Muslim population in 2006 was the 20 to 40 year olds who accounted for 50 percent of the Muslim population (Census 2006).

The relative youth of the Irish Muslim population is a situation that's reflected in Britain and according to Wolffe (1993: 146), this pattern in Britain is 'a natural result of

settlement being led by men in the young employed age group who have subsequently been followed by their wives and children.' Flynn (2006: 233) points out that the first phase of economic migration to Ireland brought young Muslim men who were followed by wives and children. This means that the Muslim family structure in Ireland is markedly different from the home country as there is a lack of support from grandparents and other relatives. Men made up 60 percent of the total Muslim population in Ireland in 2006 compared to 69 percent in 2002 (Census 2002 and Census 2006). This indicates that the trend of the early settlement of men followed by their wives and children is also evident in Ireland.

The relative youth of the Irish Muslim population coupled with the larger representation of men amongst the Muslim population may also go some way towards explaining the proliferation of makeshift mosques in Ireland. By 2009 there were just three purpose built mosques in the country. Wolffe (1993) suggests that the arrival of male migrants before women and children is also linked to the growth of makeshift mosques as men who arrive in the country first are likely to see themselves as short-term migrants, often with plans to return to their country of origin, and therefore have little interest in investing finances in religious facilities. He points out that Muslim communities in Britain began to make more effort to create structures to allow for the full observance of their religion once women and children started to arrive.

The Muslim population in Ireland is occupationally and socially diverse with Muslims represented in every occupational group from farming, fishing and forestry to teaching,

computer software, construction, the Gardai and armed forces. Muslims are also represented in every socio-economic group from employers and managers to lower professional, unskilled and agricultural workers. Notably, according to the 2002 census, there was only one Muslim person recorded as employed in religious occupations - the smallest number in this category for any religious grouping in Ireland at that time. However, by 2006 this number had risen to 5 (Census 2002 and Census 2006).

According to the 2006 Census, the two occupational groupings with the largest number of Muslim persons working were 'health and related workers' and 'personal service and childcare workers' which between them accounted for 42 percent of working Muslims.<sup>1</sup> (Census 2006). A high proportion of Muslims in Ireland belong to the higher social classes.<sup>2</sup> 18 percent of all Muslims in Ireland in 2006 were categorised as 'professional workers' while only 7 percent of the total Irish population belonged to this category (Census 2006). This contrasts to Europe as a whole where, according to Armstrong (2000: 150), the Muslim community is predominantly working class.

According to the 2002 Census, 34 percent of all Muslims in Ireland belonged to the top two social class categories of 'professional workers' and 'managerial and technical'. This had changed by 2006 when 30 percent of Muslims belonged to these categories.

However, it still shows significant differences from the situation in Britain where, in

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<sup>1</sup> The Occupation classification used in the census is based on the UK Standard Occupational Classification with modifications to reflect the Irish labour market conditions. The code to which a person's occupation is classified is determined by the kind of work he or she performs in earning a living. (Census 2006, Volume 13, appendix 2: 137)

<sup>2</sup> The social class category in the Census ranks occupations by the level of skill required on a social class ranging from 1 (highest) to 7 (lowest) – (Census 2006, Volume 13, appendix 2: 138)

1984, only about 10-15 percent of Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslim households were categorized as professional or managerial (Badawi, Nielsen and Smith cited in Wolffe, 1993: 147). This indicates that whilst there are significant similarities between the experiences of Muslims in Britain and Muslims in Ireland, there are also major differences between the two groups. The economic and social status of Muslims in Ireland appears to be higher than that of Muslims in the United Kingdom (Peach, cited in Flynn, 2006: 235) and this points to a significant difference in experiences.

Interestingly the number of average hours worked by Muslims in the week before Census Day 2002 is higher than for any other religious grouping. The average hours worked by Muslims at 42.1 hours was 4.1 hours longer than the average worked by persons in the country during the week ending 28<sup>th</sup> April 2002 (Census 2002). It would be speculation to ascertain the reasons for the higher working hours but it could be linked to the high proportion of Muslims working in the health services or working in their own businesses.

Few Muslim women have entered the workforce in Ireland with the majority of Irish Muslim women following what are often perceived to be the traditional female roles of childrearing and homekeeping (Flynn, 2006: 233-234). Eighty percent of Muslims working in Ireland in 2006 were male with just 20 percent of the Muslim working population female (Census 2006). This could point to significant cultural differences in relation to the way gender roles are defined within the Islamic religious tradition compared to within Ireland although it is important to bear in mind that there is a higher number of male than female Muslims in Ireland.

It is estimated that there may be over 3,500 asylum seekers amongst the Muslim population in Ireland. These include Muslims from Bosnia, Somalia, Albania, Nigeria, Kenya, Algeria, Libya, Iraq and Egypt. According to Flynn, their arrival and assimilation has placed great strain on the resources of the existing Muslim community in Ireland (Flynn, 2006: 231).

It is important to note also that there are problems with using the census as a guide to the Muslim situation in Ireland. According to the 1991 census, the number of Muslims in Ireland was 3,873 but Flynn suggests that this number was an underestimate with a more realistic figure being 6,000 (Flynn, 2006: 223). Flynn doesn't, however, suggest reasons as to why this may be an underestimate. Also, prior to 1991 the religious category 'Muslim' was grouped in with 'other stated religions' so it is impossible to establish the exact rate of growth of the Muslim population in Ireland prior to the 1990s. Other problems are posed by the fact that the 1996 census did not include a question on religious affiliation and the fact that the census does not include a question on whether a person was born into the religion or has converted so it is impossible to establish the number of Irish converts to Islam. The fact that mosques in Ireland do not have exact figures of the numbers of people attending adds to the difficulties in trying to ascertain the total Muslim population present in Ireland.



## Conclusion

A study of the experiences of Muslims in Ireland must be situated within an historical framework that includes early religious developments and practices, diversity, social and cultural encounters between Islam and Europe, and the early encounters between Islam and Ireland. Early developments within Islam such as the creation of the *ummah* and sectarian divisions have continued to impact on Muslim populations throughout the world and inform Muslim experiences in Ireland whilst the early encounters between Islam and Europe which were fraught with conflict and animosity continue to inform perceptions of the other from both perspectives.

The early scattered instances of Muslims living in Ireland meant that, for centuries, Islam in Ireland was a foreign curiosity that evoked both fear and fascination. This, coupled with the wider historical context of Islam in Europe, has resulted in a knowledge base of Islam that has largely been built on grand narratives rather than raw experience. But what implications does this have for relationships between Ireland and Islam? And how do Muslims adapt to what has been for centuries a relatively religiously homogenous Irish non-Muslim society? The next chapter addresses these questions.

## Chapter 3: Issues

In the Muslim world, ideological thought patterns represent the West as selfish, materialistic and dominating. In the West, the equivalent thought patterns perceive Islam as irrational, fanatical and expansionist. In the age of global communication and migration, these thought patterns, in the variety of their subtle and not-so-subtle expressions, foster antagonism.

(Mitri, 2007: 27)

### Introduction

This chapter begins by an examination of the traditional Islamic dichotomous view of the world as divided into *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb* (the abode of Islam and the abode of war). It then examines ways in which Muslims living in Europe deal with life under non-Muslim rule and points out the diversity of responses to what is considered to be a less than ideal situation. It explores the key concept of adaptation in relation to religious practices and the concept of integration in relation to the wider non-Muslim Irish society. It then focuses on the impact of a number of factors on integration including the national policy on integration, the dominance of the Catholic Church in primary educational institutions, meta-narratives on Islam, media representations of Islam and Muslims and Islamophobia. It suggests that the media play a powerful role in perpetuating the meta-narrative of Islam as enemy. As Mitri (2007: 17) points out, history is mediated by contemporary education and community and hatred is often stirred up by the media.

Islamophobia therefore is linked to media representations and meta-narratives of Islam prevalent in contemporary societies.

## Muslims in non-Muslim countries

Islamic thought has traditionally made the distinction between *dar al-Islam* (the abode of Islam or the abode of peace) which is made up of countries under Muslim rule and *dar al-harb* (the abode of war) made up of countries under non-Muslim rule. Muslims living under non-Muslim rule had two options sanctioned by the Quran in order to deal with this less than ideal situation – *jihad* or struggle and *hijrah* or emigration. However, in practice the majority of Muslims adopted a variety of measures to deal with their situation (Wolffe, 1993: 156-7).

Early generations of Muslims in Europe often viewed their stay as transitory and their plans to emigrate homewards were utilized as a way of dealing with their situation of living in *dar al-harb*. However, as their presence in Europe became more permanent they looked towards *jihad* as their way of dealing with the situation. This involved a struggle to practice their religion (Wolffe, 1993: 157). But what are the essentials of Islamic religious practice which have to be maintained in a non-Muslim country?

There is an expansive diversity of stances amongst Muslims in relation to what are the non-negotiable aspects of their faith and therefore the aspects which must be followed when living under non-Muslim rule. Different sects, law schools, cultures, nationalities, religious movements and leaders all contribute to this ongoing debate. There are also

numerous definitions of *dar al-harb*. For example, Malekites reject the idea that Muslims can live in *dar al-harb*, Hanbalis and Shiis tolerate it on the condition that Muslims can practice the pillars of their faith. Hanafis distinguish between what is permitted, required, recommended and forbidden and say that some laws including the prohibition on interest can be suspended if a Muslim is living in *dar al-harb* (Cesari, 2004: 160 and Ramadan, 2004: 65-66). Others completely reject the distinction between *dar al-harb* and *dar al-Islam* and suggest that the concepts are either no longer valid or should be replaced (Cesari, 2004: 161 and Ramadan, 2004: 72). For Ramadan (2004: 75 & 176), for example, the concepts could be considered anachronistic as globalization has made the whole world one house and 'geography is not and can no longer be the criterion for distinguishing between Islamic and non-Islamic areas'.

There are numerous categorizations that attempt to summarise and define the endless stances adopted by Muslims in relation to the practice of their religion in a non-Muslim country. Chryssides (1994: 58-9), for example, identifies three possible outcomes:

- Apostasy – where the faith is completely abandoned.
- Adaptation/Accommodation – where the adherents of a faith retain what are considered to be the essentials of the religion whilst discarding what are considered to be the peripheral elements and taking on board elements of the prevailing culture.
- Renewed vigour – where practitioners retain the full identity of the religion and sometimes even exaggerate it.

Meanwhile, Wolffe (1993: 160-164) identifies four different kinds of relationship between Islam and British society:

- Assimilation – the decline of Islamic practices and the growing similarity of behaviour to that of the majority community.
- Integration – the adaptation of structures of the surrounding society to facilitate the practice of Islam.
- Redefinition – reinterpreting the faith to assess the non-negotiable and peripheral aspects of the religion.
- Isolation – the separation of adherents from their surrounding society.

In reality these categorizations are ideal types or concepts used to simplify and provide a framework for a complex reality that shifts through different shades of difference and constantly undergoes change. Clearly there are linkages between the different modes of categorization and it is important to acknowledge that Muslims in Ireland could be labeled according to each of the above defined categories. This research, however, rather than attempting to categorise different modes of interaction between Muslims and Irish society, focuses on Muslim perceptions of their experiences in Ireland. It focuses particularly on the adaptation of religious practices and on the integration of Muslims with non-Muslim Irish society.

## Adaptation

Immigrant groups are forced to adapt to their new surroundings on a number of levels including social, economic, cultural and even meteorological or geographical. Chryssides

(1994: 58) points out that this process often throws up a number of problems for immigrant religions. In an attempt to deal with their surroundings Muslims in Ireland are therefore often faced with a number of challenges.

Adaptation occurs out of necessity when, for example, immigrant religions have to depend on the indigenous population for social services and facilities such as medical treatment, education, the rental or buying of premises or the obtaining of planning permission. Muslim immigrants also have to adapt to new places of prayer, new ways of making time for prayer or religious festivals and the impact of geographical conditions on prayer and fasting times.

The use of the term 'adaptation' is not without its complications. The term, for example, has been linked with the categorization of different modes of interaction between Muslims and the societies in which they live. Further complications are thrown up by the fact that the term has also been linked and used synonymously with 'integration' which Wolffe (1993: 162) describes as 'the adaptation of British structures so as to facilitate the practice of Islam within them'.

Smith (2002: 8-9) points out that the desire of Muslims to practice their faith publicly in Western countries has involved a number of requests that Muslims make of the host societies in order to practice their faith. These include the building of mosques, cemeteries, the availability of Islamically acceptable food, employment, facilities for prayer in work and public institutions, the permission for or acceptance of what is

considered appropriate dress including the headscarf or beards, Islamic banks and religious rights in public schools. It could be suggested that all of these requests and their fulfillment involves some degree of adaptation on the part of Muslims as they attempt to practice their faith in social, economic and cultural surroundings where Islam is not the majority religion.

This research acknowledges the complexities involved in the utilization of the term 'adaptation' in a discussion of Islam in Ireland. However, for the purposes of this research the term is being used to refer to the ways in which Muslims living in Ireland adapt to their surroundings in order to facilitate the practice of their religion. The research focuses particularly on the difficulties faced by Muslims in this regard.

## Integration

Integration is a multi-faceted concept with multiple interpretations. Usually however, it refers to immigrants and their relationship with their host community. Heckmann (2005: 15) identifies four dimensions of the process:

- Structural integration – refers to the acquisition of rights and access to core institutions such as education, citizenship, housing.
- Cultural integration – refers to cognitive, behavioural, cultural and attitudinal change and involves change in the receiving society in a mutual interaction.
- Social integration – refers to private relationships and group memberships.
- Identificational integration – refers to a subjective sense of belonging and identification particularly along ethnic or national lines.

Whilst acknowledging that aspects of all four modes of integration identified by Heckmann are operational amongst the Muslim population in Ireland, this study focuses specifically on social integration. This relates to friendship patterns as well as involvement with non-Muslim social groups or organizations.

In 2004 the European Union adopted twelve Common Basic Principles for integration. The first principle states that 'integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States' (Commission of the European Communities, 2005). According to this definition, integration is a two-way street with an onus on both immigrants and the host society to facilitate integration. The principles outline responsibilities for both in order to facilitate integration, for example, the responsibility of the immigrant to learn the language of the host society and also the responsibility of the host society to enable immigrants to acquire this knowledge. Legrain (2007: 257) points out that integration therefore will not work if both sides are not committed to the process because if the host society is racist 'or even indifferent' immigrants will not be able to integrate even if they themselves are prepared to adapt to local ways.

As social integration is a two way process, Heckmann (2005: 19) points out that this means it can be blocked from either direction – the immigrants can potentially isolate themselves but also integration can be blocked by the receiving society through



discrimination and racism. The following sections examine ways in which social integration can be blocked.

## National policy on integration

In the past, Ireland has been criticized for the lack of a comprehensive national integration strategy (see Moran, 2005 and Boucher, 2008). However, in May 2008, 'Migration Nation', a statement on integration strategy was launched by the Minister for Integration. It was the first document of its kind from the Office of the Minister for Integration, which had been established in June 2007, and it set out the government strategy to deal with issues relating to integration. However, the statement is not, and does not claim to be, a final document outlining a national integration policy. Indeed the statement itself recognizes the need for, and expresses commitment to, the development of a national integration policy (Migration Nation, 2008: 65).

At the time of writing, Ireland as of yet, has no comprehensive integration policy despite plans for its development. However, the Ministerial Statement of Policy envisaged a number of key actions relating to integration in Ireland which indicate the direction a future comprehensive national policy would take. These include the granting of citizenship and long-term residency contingent on proficiency of language skills of the host community, a commitment to increasing the number of language support teachers in schools, providing access to English language classes for adults and providing information to the immigrant communities. Noteworthy for the Muslim population, the statement also sets out plans to hold discussions with faith groups and religious

authorities with a view to financially support activities that provide information and assistance on settling in Ireland. However, plans do not always translate into action as evidenced by the outlined plan to develop a website for the Office of the Minister for Integration ‘over the coming months’ (2008: 51). As of April 2009 this website was still in development (see <http://www.ria.gov.ie/integration/>). In addition, a spokesperson for the Islamic Cultural Centre in Dublin stated in April 2009 that as far as he was aware no discussions had yet been held with Muslim organisations in Ireland regarding financial assistance for information on living in Ireland (Selim, 2009).

The lack of an integration strategy has implications for Muslims arriving in Ireland, particularly for asylum seekers and refugees. In 2006 it was estimated that 3,500 of the Muslim population in Ireland were refugees (Flynn, 2006: 231). Refugees include asylum seekers who have been granted refugee status. Moran (2005: 263) points out that with the state concentrating on the growing numbers of asylum seekers ‘it has placed less emphasis on the integration needs of those who have been given refugee status or the right to remain in the country or those invited as programme refugees’.

Moran (2005: 269) points out that the lack of a coherent integration policy exacerbates difficulties experienced by refugees trying to adjust to life in Ireland and can mean that refugees and those with leave to remain are groups which ‘will remain at the margins of Irish society into the future’. Meanwhile, Boucher (2008) describes Irish policy on integration as a ‘laissez-faire’ approach that tends to reproduce existing hierarchies of wealth, power and status and therefore favours the better resourced immigrants who are

more likely to successfully integrate into Irish society. Within the Muslim population of Ireland, this approach would therefore favour the more educated and those working in well-paid or high-status jobs whilst those who are less educated or unemployed are more likely to remain isolated and on the margins of Irish society. Boucher says the approach overall has the potential to lead to a 'socially exclusive future, not a socially cohesive one' (2008). McPhee (2005: 51) suggests that responsibility for lack of Muslim integration in Ireland must lie in part with the Government and their lack of an integration policy.

Whilst there is no clear national policy on integration, attempts have been made at the level of individual institutions to facilitate integration and to inform staff of the specific requirements of Muslims. The Irish Hospice Foundation for example, have published a booklet (Caring for a Muslim Patient) which provides information for people working in the health services about Islam and Islamic requirements.

However, it would be misleading to suggest that a clear policy on integration would solve all issues relating to integration. Countries with coherent national integration strategies have also experienced serious challenges. France, which has a clear assimilationist policy, was plagued by riots in 2005 and in England, which has a clear multiculturalist policy, the London bombings of July 2005 were carried out by British Muslims. In the Netherlands which also has a multiculturalist policy, the filmmaker Theo Van Gogh was stabbed to death in 2004 by a Dutch-born Muslim who believed one of Van Gogh's films was blasphemous towards Islam (Legrain, 2007, Fokas, 2007: 4).

Integration policies in Europe in general have been called into question by Ramadan (2004: 147) who suggests that integration policies coupled with other policies have had catastrophic results for Muslims and have spread negative images of 'the Other' and given rise 'to vexatious, discriminatory, and unjust administrative measures'. It is very doubtful therefore that a comprehensive integration strategy would resolve all challenges relating to integration in Ireland. However, it is important to note the potential pitfalls and the impact of a current lack in policy.

## Religion in Ireland

Catholicism is the religion of the vast majority of people in the Republic of Ireland with the number of people who identify themselves as Roman Catholics at 87% of the population in 2006 (Census 2006). The recognition of the importance of Christianity in Ireland is evidenced by the preamble to the Irish constitution of Ireland which begins:

In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority  
and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States  
must be referred,

We, the people of Eire,

Humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus  
Christ, Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial...

(The Irish Constitution)

Up until 1972, the Irish constitution included a controversial article relating to the privileged position of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The Fifth Amendment of the Constitution Act 1972 removed this reference which stated that 'the State recognises the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens' (Lalor, 2000).

It has been suggested that one reason for the dominance of Catholicism within Ireland and the relative lack of other faiths is because of the small numbers of inward migrants into Ireland (Tovey and Share, 2000: 315). However, the past twenty-five years has reversed the migratory trend with hundreds of thousands of immigrants now arriving in Ireland from countries all over the world. This is having a significant impact on the religious make-up of Ireland which has been relatively homogenous in terms of religion. Simonsen (2002) says, in his study of Muslims in Denmark, that one of the results of a homogenous society becoming multicultural, multilingual and multireligious, is a growing sense of 'us' and 'them'. Clearly, if this was to become the case in Ireland it would have implications for both Muslims and non-Muslim Irish society.

Whilst Ireland can still be described as a Catholic country in terms of its majority religious tradition, the religious pluralism of Ireland is now 'a fact of life' (Skuce, 2006: 8). The historical and continuing dominance of the Catholic Church is reflected in national Census figures which illustrate that the vast majority of Irish people still describe themselves as Catholic. However, although 87% of people living in Ireland described themselves as Catholic in 2006, this figure was down from 95% in 1961 (Census 2006).

The changing categories of the census itself can illustrate the changing nature of religious life in Ireland. Up until 1981 the question relating to religion in the Irish census was largely concerned with Christian denominations. The published Census of 1981 had eight religious categories (see Table 3). Four of these categories related to Christian denominations and the only other named religion was ‘Jewish’ (Census 1981). 1991 was the first year that the number of Muslims living in Ireland was enumerated with 3,875 Muslims recorded as living in Ireland in that year. Also in that year the number of religious categories increased up to 26. This breakdown of religious categories reflected the changing nature of Irish society. Categories in 1991 included Latter Day Saints, Pantheist, Greek Orthodox and Lapsed Roman Catholic as well as Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Baha’I. This 26-fold categorisation of religious affiliation was repeated in the 2002 and 2006 census.

Year	Total	Religion						No religion	Not stated
		Roman Catholic	Church of Ireland (incl. Protestant)	Presbyterian	Methodist	Jewish	Other stated religions*		
1881	3,870,020	3,465,332	317,576	56,498	17,660	394	12,560		
1991	3,525,719	3,228,327	89,187	13,199	5,037	1,581	38,743	66,270	83,373

TABLE 3: extract from Census 2006 to show breakdown of religious classification 1881-1991 (Census 2006, Volume 13: 9)

\* The ‘other stated category’ includes the categories ‘No religion’ and ‘Not stated’ for 1881

The increasing number of religious classifications included in the published national census indicates the growing number of religions present in Ireland as well as an increasing number of adherents in these religions. For example, the number of people describing themselves as Hindu living in Ireland jumped from 3,099 in 2002 to 6,082 in

2006 and the number of Muslims increased from 19,147 in 2002 to 32,539 in 2006. Other religions such as Orthodox, Latter Day Saints (Mormon), Jehovah's Witness and Baptist also saw significant increases in their numbers between these years (Census 2006).

Despite the growing number of religions present in Ireland, the continuing involvement of the Catholic Church in many aspects of Irish social life can pose significant challenges for people from other faiths newly arrived in this country including in the field of education. In 2007 in Ireland, over 3,000 of the State's 3,280 primary schools were controlled by the Catholic Church (The Irish Times, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2007) and most primary schools were under the patronage of the local Bishop who either managed the school or nominated a person to manage the school (Department of Education and Science, 2007a).

This in effect has had a number of consequences for other religious denominations, including Muslims. Although legislation in Ireland requires that schools do not discriminate across nine stated grounds, one of which is religion, a number of exemptions do apply in relation to the admission of students. This exemption states that discrimination does not exist in a situation where the objective of the school 'is to provide education in an environment which promotes certain religious values' and therefore admits students of a particular religious denomination in preference to others or refuses to admit a person of another denomination where it is proved that the refusal 'is essential to maintain the ethos of the school' (Equal Status Act, 2000).

Essentially the legislation permits schools to discriminate when awarding places on the basis of religion. However, because the vast majority of primary schools in Ireland are run by the Catholic Church, this means that non-Catholic children are most liable to be discriminated against in the area of education in Ireland. This has implications for wider social patterns although it is important to note that Catholic schools do take in non-Catholic pupils.

In October 2007, a government-funded study examining schooling in Dublin found that twenty-one of the twenty-five schools in the Dublin 15 area operate under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, and therefore prioritise children with Catholic Birth certificates. The reports states that this could have significant consequences for the development of communities as admission policies in one school have a knock-on impact on other schools in the area. (McGorman and Sugrue, 2007: 139-140). The report states that legislative and policy responses are necessary ‘if social fragmentation, and ghettoisation, exacerbated by ‘white flight,’ are not to become established and entrenched’ (McGorman and Sugrue, 2007: pxiv).

Following publication of the report a number of newspapers published articles citing evidence of ‘white flight’ in areas around Dublin (The Irish Times, October 19, 2007; McInerney and Bracken, 4 November, 2007). ‘White flight’ relates to a phenomenon where Irish people move out of areas, or take their children out of schools, when immigrants move in. The segregation of communities along Catholic and non-Catholic lines could potentially result in communities consisting almost entirely of people from



one religious denomination. This has worrying implications for Muslims living in Ireland and for the potential for integration between Muslim and non-Muslim individuals and communities.

Clearly the religious make-up of Ireland is changing. This change is reflected in the changing categorisation of the national census and it also has a physical manifestation in the architectural landscape of the country as church spires are joined by occasional minarets and domes across the skyline. Moves are being made to address the changing religious make-up of Ireland, for example in 2007 the Department of Education announced a pilot scheme for a new model of primary school patronage which it was hoped would cater for the diversity of religious faiths now present in Ireland (Department of Education and Science, 2007b). However, the traditional dominance of the Catholic Church and its importance as enshrined in the constitution and legislation can and does impact on religious minority groups including Muslims and can have an effect on social integration and cohesion.

## Secularisation of society

Secularisation is a term that is used to refer to a broad set of changes that affects the declining role and importance of religion in society. According to Cassidy (2002: 40) 'there is no doubting the evidence of a growth in the secularisation of Irish society'. Mitri (2007: 25) points out that until the late seventies, secularisation was seen as almost universally irreversible. Indeed the separation of church and state has characterised most European countries for the last fifty to one hundred years (Smith, 2002: 6-7). It was

widely assumed that this pattern of the privatisation of religion would continue through to the end of the twentieth century and into the next. Coupled with this expectation was the assumption that immigrant religions would also follow the same pattern and become more privatised affairs (Nielsen: 1992:vii).

However, religion has survived and 'it has now become clear that the predictions of technological and modernising pace expelling religion to the margins were wrong' with recent decades witnessing a return to or resurgence of religion (Mitri, 2007: 26). Whilst certain religious institutions have lost power, other beliefs and practices have gained (Mitri, 2007: 27) and Islam has emerged in the public sphere of many western countries.

As discussed in chapter one, Islam has been a religio-political system since 622 C.E. and the separation of religion and politics coupled with living under non-Muslim rule can cause challenges for Muslims. In a number of European countries it has led to Muslim demands to display religious symbols including the wearing of Islamic dress and other outward affirmations of Islamic identity. In Ireland, for example, Muslims have called for the right to wear the *hijab* in schools (McGarry, 2008) and in 2007 the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin announced plans to build new toilets so that Muslims would not have to face Mecca whilst using the existing facilities (Horan, 2007).

The American sociologist Jose Casanova, has argued that secularisation as experienced in Western Europe is not representative of what's happening world-wide. Others have warned that the secularisation theory is Eurocentric and should not or cannot be applied

universally especially when evidence points to the renewed role of religion in the public life of many non-European societies in recent years including for example, in Muslim majority countries such as Afghanistan and Iran (Bowman, Herbert, Mumm, 2001: 75). Many immigrants and immigrant communities in Ireland have come from these non-Western backgrounds and cultures where converse to the predicted trend, religion is playing an increasingly important role in the public life of the society. Therefore it is likely that the experience of the renewed relevance of religion in their country of origin is brought to Ireland where Islam is becoming increasingly visible in ways that challenge the secularisation theory.

## Islam in the media

In the past fifty years there have been a number of events linked to the Muslim world which have had global significance that has spanned and stretched as far as Ireland. These include the Arab oil embargo of the early 1970s, the Iranian revolution of 1978-9, the 9/11 attacks on America in 2001, the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Danish Cartoon controversy in 2005. These events generated economic, political and social seismic waves that stretched internationally across cultures and boundaries and have also resulted in global discourses about Islam and its perceived confrontation with the west. These events have a tangible economic effect on European countries but also, as Mitri (2007) points out, the effects of the discourse created largely by the media following these events affects local relations between Muslims and Christians.

The coverage of events related to the Muslim world in the media therefore plays a key role in informing Western and Irish perceptions of Islam and Muslims. The prevalence of Islam in the media is pointed out by Ruthven (2006: xx) who says that since the 9/11 2001 hardly a day goes by without stories about Islam appearing in the media. It is this coverage of events which has resulted in the familiarity of many people in the West, including Ireland, with the terms Muslim and Islam (Esposito, 2005: xiii).

However, coverage of Islam in the media often relates to events which provide images of the militant versions of Islam (Cesari, 2004: 3). It is coverage which Esposito (2005: xiii) says has too often 'simply been a knowledge of stereotypes and distortions, the picture of a monolithic reality dubbed Islamic fundamentalism, a term often signifying militant radicalism and violence'. This type of coverage therefore encourages 'connections between Islam, violence and fanaticism' (Cesari, 2004: 2).

Whilst Western perceptions of Islam as a violent religion are often rooted in historical events such as the crusades, these views are reinforced by contemporary media coverage about Muslim extremists and terrorist attacks (Smith, 2002: 5). This means that people in Ireland (and elsewhere) who are familiar with Islam through its representation in the media may have a distorted image of Islam and of Muslims.

The relatively recent arrival of large numbers of Muslims in Ireland coupled with the fact that Ireland was a colonised rather than a colonising country means that Irish awareness of Islam is dependent for a large part on the media. This is similar to the American

situation. Said (1997: 16) points out that many European countries such as France, England, Holland and Italy have a long tradition of direct experience of the Islamic world through their colonies or empires whereas in America 'Islam has entered mainstream American consciousness, not through direct experience with Muslims, but through the media and through the news stories in which Islam is connected with issues like oil, Iran, Afghanistan, terrorism'. This means that, in countries like America and Ireland, media representations of Islam are instrumental in informing public and mainstream opinion.

In the past Ireland has been pinpointed as a country where there have been negative portrayals of Islam in the media. A report on Anti-Islamic Reactions in the EU after 9/11 found that media attitudes 'helped to reinforce hurtful stereotypes about Islam, particularly in the Netherlands, Greece, Ireland, and Italy' (European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia in Cesari, 2004: 6). Flynn (2006: 232) points out that coverage of Islam in the media, much of it negative, 'has raised the Irish public's awareness of Islam and of Islam in their midst'.

The difficulties of accurately representing Islam in the media are exacerbated by the huge diversity within Islam. Said (1997: 57-60) points out that whilst the media identify Islam as one unified unit the reality of Islam is a complex diversity involving a multitude of interpretations, law schools and geographical contexts. There is the additional complexity of trying to disentangle the cultural trappings and religious principles of Muslims because Islam is located in, but separate to, the cultures, traditions and dresses in which it exists (Said, 2004: 78). Media coverage of all religions faces this same difficulty.

The impact of media representations undeniably has consequences for Muslims and non-Muslims in contemporary societies including Ireland. Ramadan (2004: 71) points out that the media portrayal of events linked with the Muslim world can often cause problems for Muslims living in the West because it casts a negative light on Muslims and leads to prejudices and preconceived ideas about Islam and Muslims. He goes so far as to suggest that media representations of Islam are one of the main sources of difficulties for Muslims living in the West and often result in discrimination and suspicion. The negative portrayal of Islam can also result in ‘a sort of psychological pressure that drives Muslims to adopt a defensive and often apologetic stance, which is not always objective’ (Ramadan, 2004: 139).

Muslims living in Ireland have expressed their concerns about the impact of media representations of Islam. In March 2007, the Irish National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism hosted a Roundtable Discussion on Issues Facing Irish and British Muslims. It was attended by Muslims from a range of backgrounds including Muslim organisations and cultural groups, Muslim academics and writers as well as participants from the media and Human Rights Organisations. During the discussion participants expressed their concerns about terms being used to describe Muslims in the media and felt that terminologies such as ‘fundamental’, ‘moderate’ and ‘Islamic terrorism’ were being used and had little or no relevance to how Muslims identified themselves. ‘It was considered by many of the Muslim participants that such terminologies are media and political constructs that are designed in such a way that can

create division between Muslims' (Wallace, 2007: 19). A booklet by the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (The Muslim Community in Ireland, 2007) stated that recent years have seen an increase in 'alarmist, selective and sensationalised journalism' related to Islam and Muslims in a number of Irish newspapers.

The media coverage of Islam and events linked to the Muslim world, therefore often result in misleading representations that can work to perpetuate hostility and ignorance (Said, 1997: xlviii) and can also work to cause divisions with Muslims. Crude media stereotypes damage perceptions of Islam and can sometimes be used to justify discriminatory behaviour. This in turn has the potential to set in motion a series of defensive reactions. Essentially however, media coverage of Islam feeds into the dominant meta-narratives and discourses on 'Islam as enemy' which ultimately result in Islamophobia and strained relations between Muslims and their host societies in the West. As Legrain (2007) points out, it is perceptions and prejudices rather than reality which is important in relation to immigrants or foreigners as they are strangers and therefore maybe largely unknown.

## Meta-narrative of Islam and Orientalism

This research adopts what is termed a radical view of society. This involves seeing society as in a state of constant conflict. The view is in opposition to the regulatory view where society is seen as unified and cohesive (Burrell and Morgan in Holden and Lynch, 2004: 398). However, postmodernism is the basis of the radical view of society and

postmodernism involves the recognition that grand narratives generalising about the world are redundant and unable to explain the workings of contemporary societies (Bowman, Herbert and Mumm, 2001: 72). However, this research also acknowledges the role that grand narratives have played, and continue to play, in discursive formations relating to Islam. It suggests that these grand narratives, whilst acknowledging they are still in operation, are unable to accurately represent Islam as it exists in the world today and often result in misunderstandings and conflict.

An essentialist approach which portrays Islam as a risk factor and enemy to the West is one which is still prevalent in contemporary societies (Cesari, 2004: 22 & 175). This approach is evident in representations of Islam on television and radio as well as newspapers, news magazines and films. Said (1997: xxvii) points out that even popular mainstream films in the West such as the Indiana Jones saga portrays Muslims as 'evil, violent, and above all, eminently killable'.

This meta-narrative of Islam as enemy has roots in historical encounters between Europe and Islam but it has also been informed by centuries of what is termed 'Orientalist discourse' as well as academic research (Cesari, 2004: 22 & 175). This Orientalist discourse is rooted in nineteenth and twentieth century European colonialism which created a dichotomous world with the Orient pitted against the Occident or the East against the West. Therefore, it is a discourse that is rooted in the power structures of the West and this power confers authority to generate representations of Islam and the Orient.



Orientalism can be seen as an exercise in cultural strength and is 'the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority' (Said, 2003: 40 & 42).

Orientalist discourse is the language used to refer to the Orient and this is pertinent to a study of Islam because the term 'Orient' 'was most rigourously understood as applying to the Islamic Orient' (Said, 2003: 75). Said (2003: 60) points out that Orientalist discourse neglected information about what Muslims actually believed or did and instead focused on generating representations of Muslims for a Western audience. The effect of Orientalist discourse was pervasive in Western societies and culture including in literature and the arts (Esposito, 2005, p58).

The generalisations, stereotypes and untruths that have been generated about Muslims in Orientalist discourse have impacted upon many aspects of Western society including the media where these generalisations are reproduced and regurgitated (Said, 2003: xv). As pointed out above, media coverage of events linked to Muslims often reinforces negative stereotypes and also contributes to a meta-narrative about Islam. This meta-narrative includes, for example, what has been termed the 'Bin Laden Effect' which consists of casting all Muslims within the United States and Europe in the role of The Enemy and transforming them into scapegoats for the entire society (Cesari, 2004: 35).

The meta-narrative of Islam as enemy has implications for public opinion and for Muslim identity formation. The totality of the discourse is 'imposed on Muslims' and 'results in Muslims having to examine their identity and question what does it mean to be a Muslim'

(Cesari, 2004: 21). The meta-narrative also contributes to the argument for a ‘clash of civilisations’ between the West and Islam and can lead to justifications for Islamophobia in one of its many guises.

## The clash of civilisations

The controversial thesis of ‘the clash of civilisations’ was first put forward by Samuel Huntington in 1993 and since then has become a persuasive and influential argument in political, academic and media circles. A brief examination of this argument is necessary in this present study, not because of the truth of ‘the clash of civilisations’ but because of how influential a discourse it has become and because of the impact of the argument upon perceptions of Islam by non-Muslims.

The basic premise of the ‘clash of civilisations’ argument is that future conflicts in the world will be between eight identified civilisations. Huntington (1997) suggests that the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union resulted in an ideological vacuum which saw religions and civilisations replacing ideologies as the major fulcrum upon which conflicts balance. His argument has particular relevance for global perceptions of Islam for a number of reasons. Firstly, because, according to Huntington religion is one of the key defining characteristics of civilisations. Secondly, because there has been a global resurgence of religion in the later decades of the twentieth century and more specifically there has been an ‘Islamic Resurgence’ which he suggests has affected Muslims in every country around the world. Thirdly, because one of the eight civilisations which

Huntington identifies is the Islamic civilisation and, fourthly, because one of the dominant clashes which he predicts for the future is between the West and Islam.

Huntington's thesis includes a number of justifications for predicting a clash between Islam and the West. One is the idea that the overall trend in Islam has been in an anti-Western direction and that this is the consequence of an Islamic resurgence which is against the perceived 'Westoxification of Muslim societies' (1997: 213). This pits the world dichotomously into an 'us' and 'them' and according to Huntington this division persists despite Muslims and non-Muslims living peaceably side by side in many societies and countries around the world. He suggests that Western societies which have experienced inward migration of Muslims in recent years are likely to become 'countries divided into Christian and Muslim communities' (1997: 204).

Huntington (1997: 204-211) says one of the reasons for the internal division of countries is because 'European societies generally either do not want to assimilate immigrants or have great difficulty doing so'. He also suggests that conflict is generated between the monotheistic religions of Islam and Christianity because each of these religions 'sees the world in 'us-and-them' terms'. Regardless of the reasons for this perceived division, the argument has the potential to stir up fears and concerns about the presence of Islam in Western societies such as Ireland.

New evidence from surveys by Pew and Gallup suggest that the theory of the clash of civilisations is unfounded as they found 'wide areas of agreement between Muslims and

non-Muslims in Europe' and found that the Muslim terrorist movement has very little support in European Muslim communities (in Klausen, 2007: x). There have also been critics of the theory including Edward Said (1997: 43) who suggests that the thesis, which includes references to Islam's 'bloody borders', engenders fear and less knowledge about Islam. He says that the thesis is used as a tool to quash Islamic opposition to the US role as the world superpower because books which focus on essentialised, simplistic pictures of Islam 'furnish an additional weapon in the contest to subordinate, beat down, compel, and defeat any Arab or Muslim resistance to United States-Israeli dominance (Said, 1997: xxxv).

The argument on the 'clash of civilisations' has been persuasive and pervasive since its first publication. There have been both supporters and critics of the thesis but regardless of the stance taken on the validity of the argument, there can little doubt that it has been instrumental in informing discourses on conflict between Islam and the West in contemporary societies and its influence on a global scale cannot be underestimated. If we are to take on board Huntington's argument as plausible then Islam and the West will be pitted against each other regardless of the fact that people from both civilisations live side by side in societies and countries all over the world. Ramadan (2004: 226) says that even if the clash of civilisations is not yet a reality that 'the ingredients that could lead to it are very present in current mentalities: on both sides, the lack of knowledge of the other (and of self), the acceptance of simplistic and absolute caricatures and final judgements, not to mention conflicting political and geostrategic interests, are objective features that could lead to the breakdown'.

Huntington and Ramadan both suggest that knowledge of the other is the key factor in avoiding future violent clashes between the West and Islam. Huntington (1997: 32) says members from all civilisations should focus on the ‘commonalities rule’: ‘peoples in all civilisations should search for and attempt to expand the values, institutions, and practices they have in common with peoples of other civilisations’.

## Islamophobia

The neologism ‘Islamophobia’ emerged as recently as the late 1990s when anti-Muslim discrimination was being discussed in Britain (Cesari, 2004: 3). The term itself refers to anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination and to hostility towards Islam. One of the first uses of the term was in 1996 by the Runnymede Trust in Britain, an independent charity working on issues of race and ethnicity, when they established a Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. The following year the Commission published a report in which they justified the new term ‘Islamophobia’ on the basis of the dramatic growth in the instances of anti-Muslim prejudice which they said required a new term in order for it to be identified and tackled (cited in Vertovec, 2002: 24).

The prevalence and growth of Islamophobia in Europe and America has been outlined in numerous reports, articles and books over the past decade. Ramadan suggests that the general picture Westerners have of Muslims is negative and could be called Islamophobia (2004: 7) whilst Cesari (2004: 4 & 35) suggests that Islamophobia in Europe is expressed

in public with increasing frequency and that instances of discrimination against Muslims in public places in both Europe and the US have increased since 2001.

Despite the widespread recognition of the existence and prevalence of Islamophobia in Western countries, a 2006 report by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia found that discrimination against Muslims and Islamophobic incidents in the EU are ‘severely under-documented and under-reported’. The report also found that many European Muslims are facing discrimination in the areas of education, employment and housing and are also victims of Islamophobic acts including verbal abuse and physical violence (The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (b), 2006: 1).

The report by European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia documented numerous incidents of Islamophobia in the member countries of the European Union including Ireland. According to the report there were fourteen incidents of violence and assaults against Muslims reported to the Islamic Foundation of Ireland in 2004. These included a number of instances of women being verbally abused and sometimes having their headscarves forcibly removed. The report also documents an incident of a group of boys who severely beat up a twenty-three year old Irish born man and called him ‘nigger’ and ‘Bin Laden’; a man who pointed at a teenage Muslim girl on public transport in Dublin city centre and shouted ‘terrorist’ at her; and a man who approached a Muslim woman who was walking with her children in a public park and called them ‘Arab shit’. The report stated that the National Consultative Committee on Racism and

Interculturalism in Ireland had also recorded a number of what could be termed Islamophobic incidents (The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (a), 2006: 76-77).

Concerns have also been expressed that a discourse of Islamophobia is becoming more prevalent in Ireland. The director of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, Philip Watt, has suggested that a number of elements contribute to this discourse including views of Islam as monolithic, inferior to the West, violent, engaged in acts of terrorism and involved in a 'clash of civilisations' (Mac Cormaic, 2007). This discourse echoes language used in media portrayals of Islam and Muslim related events and the words are also familiar from Orientalist discourse and the 'clash of civilisations' argument. Indeed Orientalism has even been identified as the predecessor to Islamophobic discourse as the same homogenising tendencies are apparent which simplify the huge complexity, diversity and contradictions that exist within Islam (Saeed, 2007: 457).

Media representations as well as popular and academic discourses that provide stereotyped images of Islam are all woven into a complex web that fuels Islamophobia in Western societies and results in discrimination and prejudice against Muslims. The language used in these discourses is often used to justify discriminatory behaviour and laws towards Muslims in the West whose defenders say they are resisting 'fundamentalists' and 'Muslim fanatics' (Ramadan, 2004: 84).

The results of Islamophobia are manifold and affect Muslim and non-Muslim communities and their perceptions and experiences of each other. It can work to fuel fear and suspicion and can also result in isolationism, defensiveness, alienation and a reinforcement of identities based along civilisational or religious lines. Cesari (2004: 42) points out that 'hostility towards Islam often results in an intensification of one's personal attachment to Islam as the reference point of one's identity' and that this becomes even stronger when the individual has personally been the victim of discrimination.

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia who carried out a qualitative study into 'Perceptions of discrimination and Islamophobia' found that Islamophobia and discrimination can result in disaffection and alienation. They found evidence that members of Muslim communities are often victims of discriminatory practices which 'could provoke them into alienation from the wider society in which they live' (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (a), 2006: 9).

Ramadan (2004: 107) suggests that discriminatory behaviour towards Muslims in the West is a contributory factor to Muslim isolationism, which he points out is the result of a natural inclination to protect oneself from an environment considered dangerous. His views are echoed by Cesari (2004: 23) who points out that anti-Muslim racism sometimes results in 'a frightened isolationism, as well as the sometimes reactionary use of Islam' whilst Heckmann (2005: 15) points out that discrimination or even perceived discrimination can block or hinder integration.



Ultimately, the discourses that feed Islamophobic acts and behaviours are themselves fuelled in a cyclical motion by the isolation, alienation and identity formations that result from Islamophobia. It would seem that the processes interact together in a self-fulfilling cycle of prophecy, defense, action and reaction. As Cesari (2004: 181) points out, ‘many European and even American Muslims are still trapped in the vicious cycle of reaction and defensiveness in the face of Western anti-Islamic sentiment – a cycle which shows no signs of weakening, but rather grows stronger with every terrorist act committed throughout the world ‘in the name of Islam’.

The cycle that feeds and perpetuates Islamophobia can be broken down through knowledge and informed understanding of Islam and Muslims. As Ramadan (2004: 201) says, ‘knowing the other is a process that is unavoidable if fear of difference is to be overcome and mutual respect is to be attained’. This study suggests that mutual exchanges of knowledge and information between Muslims in Ireland and the wider Irish society are necessary in order to tackle incidents of Islamophobia, increase tolerance and promote integration in Irish society.

## Conclusion

Since its foundation, Islam has been a religiopolitical system where the secular and sacred are combined. However, in Ireland these spheres are becoming more divorced from each other and Islam is a minority religion. This means that living in Ireland which is ruled by non-Muslims can prove challenging for Muslims who have adopted a variety of responses to deal with this ranging from isolation to assimilation. At a basic level,

living in a non-Muslim country involves an examination of the faith to ascertain the core elements and the peripheral elements that may be discarded. This entails an evaluation of religious practice and it is suggested here that it results in some form of adaptation to the surrounding culture and society as well as some form of integration. It is suggested that because integration is a two-way process, it can be blocked by either the majority society or the minority group. It is argued that some challenges faced by Muslims in Ireland in relation to integration are as a result of Irish social policy and the traditionally homogenous nature of Irish society which has resulted in a dominance of the Catholic church in some fields including, for example, education. This study also suggests that historical relations between Islam and Europe, the representation of Islam in the media, meta-narratives about Islam as enemy and an increasing level of Islamophobia are elements that have the potential to seriously inhibit integration in Ireland. But in what ways do Muslims themselves conceive of the challenges they face in relation to religious practice and how do they themselves perceive integration, challenges to integration and their social interaction in Ireland? In order to answer these questions, a methodological approach must first be outlined.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?

(James Spradley cited in Kvale, 1996: 125)

### **Introduction**

This chapter begins with an examination of the preliminary considerations and philosophical positions relating to the nature of society, science, epistemology and ontology before briefly commenting upon the concept of 'ideal types' which will be utilised in the research. It will then discuss various approaches to the study of religion before examining in detail the phenomenological approach which is being used in this project. The research method and case study design will then be explored along with conceptual frameworks, research questions, sampling and methods of data collection before examining interview techniques in more detail. The chapter concludes with a look at the criteria for evaluating the research and an examination of ethical issues.

## Preliminary considerations

According to Crotty (1998: 2) there are four basic elements of any research project: methods, methodology, theoretical perspective and epistemology (1998: 2). Each of these four elements, which are inter-related, involve choices on the part of the researcher which will inform and underpin the development of the research. However, adopting positions on these elements presupposes that the initial questions of 'why research', 'what to research' and 'how to research' have been addressed. Burrell and Morgan (in Holden and Lynch, 2004: 397) state that in order to answer these questions effectively, different philosophical questions must be explored and developed and this necessitates adopting a position on key debates relating to two things: the nature of society and the nature of science. Adopting a position on these will also inform choices to be made regarding the four elements identified by Crotty.

## Research position on the nature of society

The two contrasting views of society outlined by Burrell and Morgan (in Holden and Lynch, 2004: 398) are: the regulatory view and the view of radical change. In the regulatory view, which has been identified as the basis of modernism, society is seen 'as unified and cohesive' whereas in the radical view, which is seen as the basis of post-modernism, society is viewed as 'in constant conflict'.

According to Bowman, Herbert and Mumm (2001: 92), postmodernism results in two key features: an eclectic mixing of styles and a fragmentation of grand narratives. The former relates to the way styles from different periods and cultures are mixed together in new

and unexpected ways. This can be manifested in different media for example through fashion and architecture and even in religion where the term 'spiritual supermarket' has been used to describe the way that information about, and experience of, religious traditions from all over the world has become available to mass audiences. A fragmentation of grand narratives means that stories that generalise about the world and that see all parts of the world as moving towards the same outcome break up and are no longer meaningful, for example, the secularisation theory (Bowman, Herbert and Mumm, 2001: 72).

The radical view of society is the basis of postmodernism. The presence of people from many different nationalities, religions and social backgrounds means that Irish society today is a multifaceted, pluralistic society which is constantly evolving and changing and therefore does not fit into the regulatory view which sees society as unified and cohesive and so, the researcher is adopting a position which is closer to the 'radical view' of society. However, the researcher does acknowledge the ongoing relevance of grand narratives in contemporary societies particularly in relation to Islam. These meta-narratives are linked to the 'regulatory view' of society. Therefore the position on society can be seen as an intermediate position although, as mentioned, it is closer to the 'radical view'.

## Research position on the nature of science

Assumptions relating to the nature of science involve the researcher adopting an objective or subjective approach and these approaches exist at opposite ends of a spectrum that

span a variety of other approaches. Holden and Lynch (2004: 399) put forward the view that these approaches are often labelled differently in research literature, for example, they state that the objectivist approach has also been labelled 'quantitative', 'positivist', 'scientific', 'experimentalist', 'traditionalist' and 'functionalist' whilst the subjectivist approach has been labelled 'qualitative', 'phenomenological', 'humanistic' or 'interpretivist'.

Crotty (1998: 1) points out that the terminology of research literature 'is far from consistent' with the same terms often used in different and even contradictory ways. This indicates that it can be a philological minefield for a researcher setting out to try to explore and map the planned research route where competing views of society, science, reality and knowledge vie with each other for inclusion as justification for the research project. However, in order to provide a philosophical justification, this research adopts an intermediate approach regarding the nature of science. This is midway between the objective and subjective extremes. This is in line with the phenomenological approach which Smith (1998: 131) identifies as an approach which 'attempts to bridge the gap between subjective everyday experiences and objective explanations in social sciences'.

## Ontological position

Ontology relates to the nature of reality and concerns questions about what exists to be investigated (Walliman, 2006: 15). According to Holden and Lynch (2004: 399), the researcher's view of reality is the cornerstone that underpins other assumptions and therefore, underpins the research project. The two extremes of this position are

objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism entails the view that reality is a concrete structure whilst constructionism holds the view that reality is a construct of the human imagination. The position of the researcher regarding ontology is that put forward by Holden and Lynch (2004: 406-7) of an intermediate philosophical approach which 'implies that reality is tangible yet humans have an input into forming its concreteness'.

## Epistemological position

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and concerns the question of how knowledge can be acquired. This research project is adopting the intermediate ontological view of reality and the epistemological position is linked to this and is therefore also what could be regarded as an intermediate position.

Walliman (2006: 15) identifies two ways of acquiring knowledge within the social sciences: empiricism and rationalism. Empiricism is knowledge gained by sensory experience whilst rationalism is knowledge gained by reasoning. However, there is also a middle approach identified by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) where observation and reason work together (Smith, 1998: 62) and it is this epistemological position which will be adopted in this research project. Broadly speaking, this comes under the umbrella label of 'idealism', which includes the phenomenological approach, and which recognises the importance of the use of ideas, interpretations, imagination, concepts and constructions to organise experience and social relations (Smith, 1998: 129-130).

In terms of the study of a religion in a particular geographical context this means an acknowledgement that knowledge about Islam in Ireland can be acquired through both observation and through an acceptance that experiences are meaningful only through the constructions of individual consciousness.

## Theoretical perspective

An examination of the theoretical perspective, or the philosophical stance underlying the chosen methodology, attempts to explain the assumptions brought to the research task by the individual researcher (Crotty, 1998: 7). The theoretical perspective is linked to the epistemological and ontological viewpoints and the justification for examining it is linked to the idea expressed by Crotty (1998: 66) that 'different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world'.

The two extreme theoretical perspectives identified by Crotty (1998: 66-7) are positivism (linked with the objective approach, empirical epistemology and quantitative methodologies) and interpretivism (linked with the subjective approach, rational epistemology and qualitative methodologies).

Positivism involves the application of the natural sciences to the study of the social world and a belief that the truth of reality can be uncovered through specific methods of investigation and is value-free and objective (Walliman, 2006: 15 and McNeill, 1990: 49 & 117). Interpretivism involves the recognition that subjective meanings play a role in social actions (Walliman, 2006: 15) and the interpretivist approach 'looks for culturally



derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world' (Crotty, 1998: 67).

The interpretivist approach recognises that the same observations can be interpreted in different ways. It also acknowledges the complexities involved when the object being studied is part of the social rather than the natural world and therefore the observer is part of what is being studied (Smith, 1998: 139). As Ninian Smart (1973: 3) points out – the study of rocks and electrons does not need to involve an examination of feelings whereas the human sciences need to take account of inner feelings 'because human beings cannot be understood unless their sentiments and attitudes are understood'.

Wilhelm Windelband (in Smith, 1998: 141) argues that this difference between studying the natural and social worlds resulted in two forms of scientific thought: nomothetic and ideographic. The nomothetic method refers to the development of general laws which are applicable over time and it is generally used in natural sciences while the ideographic method refers to unique experiences and is more often used in the social sciences (Hughes and Sharrock, 1990: 99).

The German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) tried to bridge the gap between positivism and interpretivism (Walliman, 2006: 24). He stressed the importance of verifying interpretative investigations by comparing the results with concrete reality (Walliman, 2006: 25). He argued that in order to describe social practices adequately, they must be understood from the perspective of the participants and this requires

understanding the values but without taking sides or making value judgements and this understanding, called *Verstehen*, is the subject matter of social science (Walliman, 2006: 25).

The theoretical perspective of this research project adopts the view of Weber which can be seen, once again, as an intermediate position. However, this research veers more towards the interpretivist rather than the positivist tradition as it is the subjective experiences and perceptions of the individuals that is being explored and whilst the importance of concrete material realities in the form of institutions, material resources etc. is acknowledged, it is the subjective meanings that these are given by participants and their experiences that is the key focus of this project. This research adopts the view that the interpretivist approach is particularly useful for understanding contemporary Irish society and its dramatic changes in recent decades which have resulted in an increasing uncertainty about what constitutes Irish identity. This view suggests that an interpretative approach is important ‘to discover the diversity and commonality of Irish meanings and experiences, and what the lived life is like’ (Eileen Kane cited in Tovey and Share, 2000: 38). This research is also concerned with the ideographic method as it is concerned with identifying the unique features of a case at a particular point in time.

## Ideal Types

This research will also utilise the theoretical device of ideal types which was popularised by Max Weber. Ideal types are simplified categories that allow for generalisations whilst at the same time acknowledging the complexities of the social relations being

investigated (Smith, 1998: 146). In this research the key concepts of adaptation and integration will provide the framework for a discussion of Muslims in Ireland. It is important to remember however, that this is a simplifying device used in order to identify patterns in a very complex social reality and that 'these devices offer no final answers but allow for the development of useful models of human activity' (Smith, 1998: 146).

Durkheim, in his study of suicide, recognised that the concept of an 'ideal type' was a mental construct used to organise the empirical world (Smith, 1998: 150).

Hourani (in Said, 1997: 8) goes so far as to suggest that even the term 'Islam' and terms derived from 'Islam' are 'ideal types' and he says these should be used 'subtly, with infinite reservations and adjustments of meaning'. It is important therefore to bear in mind that even 'Islam' is a term that covers a multitude of complexities, diversities and that it means different things to different people.

## The subject-object problem

As an Irish person researching Islam in Ireland it is important to recognise that the researcher has a relationship with the object of investigation. This relationship between the subject and object has come to be known as the subject-object problem as the researcher cannot be entirely excluded from the object of investigation (Smith, 1998: 7).

Smith (1998: 8) points out that all social researchers have experienced some level of socialisation and they bring this experience with them to the research including the labelling of objects of analysis and the language used to discuss the research. One particular aim during the research phase of this project is for the researcher to bracket off

preconceptions about the research topic. However, it is also important to recognise the researcher's background and relationship with the subject and to briefly outline the researcher's interaction with Muslim individuals and groups in Ireland.

Prior to this research, the researcher had both personal and professional relations with a number of Muslims in Ireland. On a personal level, the researcher was acquainted with a non-practicing Muslim on a social level and, as mentioned previously, on a professional level the researcher had produced a series of radio programmes for a local radio station in Ireland on the subject of Islam in Ireland. The making of this series brought the researcher into direct contact with practicing Muslims from a wide range of backgrounds. Although these contacts were made on a professional basis, friendly communication was kept up and maintained with a number of participants. Prior to the making of the series of radio programmes the researcher had very little knowledge of Islam or Muslims in Ireland.

Smith (1998: 10) points out that despite the attempt of social researchers to keep their distance from the objects being studied, this 'does not prevent cultural values and even moral judgements from entering the research process in fundamental ways'. Whilst acknowledging that the researcher's cultural, geographic and social situatedness and background may have influenced the researcher and the outcome of the research, the stress here is upon the fact that the researcher is attempting to bracket off any preconceptions whilst carrying out this research. This is in keeping with the phenomenological approach being adopted in this study.

## Approaches to the study of religion

Bowman, Herbert and Mumm (2001: 38) identify theism, atheism and agnosticism as three of the most common individual perspectives on religion. They suggest that these three perspectives can be linked respectively with specific approaches to the study of religion: theology, reductionism and phenomenology.

The theological perspective 'starts by assuming that the divine, however defined, is real and that religion is a response or approach to spiritual realities' (Bowman, Herbert & Mumm, 2001: 39).

The reductionist perspective is concerned with the origins of religion and its function in society, for example Karl Marx (1818-83) famously described religion as 'the opium of the people' whilst the sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) viewed religion as having a social function of cementing societies and facilitating integration (Bowman, Herbert & Mumm, 2001: 40-41). The sociology of religion which emerged from the reductionist perspective tends to be associated with objectivity, empirical observation and quantitative data (Bowman, Herbert & Mumm, 2001: 41).

The phenomenological perspective is an approach that involves allowing the religious believer to express their beliefs and experiences in their own words and from their own perspective. It accepts that religion exists in the world but does not make a value judgement as to whether it is true or false. It has therefore been termed 'methodological

agnosticism' (Bowman, Herbert & Mumm, 2001: 42). Ninian Smart, from the religious studies department at Lancaster University, says that this approach accepts that 'God is real for Christians whether or not he exists' (in Bowman, Herbert & Mumm, 2001: 42). The phenomenology of religion developed particularly in the 1960s and 70s and it is linked with qualitative methods such as interviews and participant observation.

Each of these approaches are identified as subsections within the broad field of 'religious studies' which is the general term used to identify modern scholarly approaches to the study of religion. However, religious studies also includes a wide range of other approaches including history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, linguistics and cognitive sciences (Allen, 2005: 185). Ninian Smart (1973: 9) points out that the study of religion is, or should be, polymethodic and includes methods from other disciplines such as history and sociology.

This research, which focuses on religious adherents rather than a religion, is adopting a phenomenological led approach. It also recognises that the phenomenology of religion is dependent on research data and information from other approaches (Allen, 2005: 197). Aspects of other approaches will therefore also be included in the research, specifically, approaches from the history of religion, sociology, cultural studies and cultural anthropology.

## The phenomenology of religion

This research is utilising a phenomenological methodology in order to describe the experiences, practices and beliefs of Muslims in Ireland. The phenomenological approach is rooted in the interpretivist theoretical perspective which, as outlined above, distinguishes between the natural sciences and the social sciences. This perspective acknowledges the importance of understanding social actions from the viewpoint of the social actors. In order to see the world from the standpoint of the participants, specific research methods and qualitative methods of data collection are used which concentrate on words and descriptions (McNeill, 1990: 120).

The term 'phenomenology' has different meanings according to the context in which it is used (Bowman, Herbert & Mumm, 2001: 42). Phenomenology, as a philosophy, was founded by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) in the early part of the twentieth century. He argued that human actors construct reality through their own perceptions and therefore it is the act of description which creates the object of analysis (Walliman, 2006: 24 and Smith, 1998: 164).

Husserl's position was developed further by the philosopher and sociologist Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) who argued that there is no such thing as 'hard facts' because everything is subject to interpretation and facts are constructed by intersubjectivity or the interaction of individual actors through communication (Smith, 1998: 164). Therefore, to understand social existence, Schutz suggested that it is necessary to account for the motives, plans, shared relationships and expectations of human actors.

Schutz advocated that researchers of the social sciences and cultures follow the ‘postulate of adequacy’ whereby scientific statements should account for everyday experience and be understandable to those who are being studied (Smith, 1998: 16). In order to do this, he suggested that researchers adopt the vantage point of the ‘stranger’ who can ‘participate in everyday life yet still maintain a degree of detachment’ as this would bridge the gap between social scientific accounts and everyday experiences (Smith, 1998: 17). Schutz says that this technique also allows for the research to be made available to a wider audience as it is not just written for the scientific community (Smith, 1998: 17). The vantage point of the stranger is being adopted in this research in order to balance the detachment and involvement of the researcher in the lives of those being studied and to facilitate communication to an audience wider than just the academic community.

In the twentieth century, philosophical phenomenology took many different forms but there are five particular characteristics of it that have relevance for the phenomenology of religion (Allen, 2005: 189-190):

- Phenomenology tends to be a descriptive approach
- It is against reductionism
- It assumes that all acts of consciousness are intentional
- Phenomenologists are expected to bracket off their own beliefs and judgements in a process known as ‘phenomenological *epoche*’
- It aims to gain insight into the essential structures and meanings of phenomena in what is known as *eidetic vision*



The application of philosophical phenomenology to the study of religions can be identified as early as the eighteenth century with the work of Charles de Brosses in the 1760s and Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1799 who both suggested that students of religion should study the actions and beliefs of religious practitioners rather than what people are expected to do or the religious textbooks (Sharpe, 2005: 36). But it was P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848-1920) who is often considered to be the founder of phenomenology of religion because of his descriptive, comparative approach to the study of religious phenomena (Allen, 2005: 191).

By the 1950s there was a new readiness by scholars of religion, who were traditionally associated with theological approaches, to listen to people from other faiths explaining their beliefs and rationale for their beliefs (Sharpe, 2005: 39). Part of the reason for this was the demise of colonialism which 'created a new international, intercultural and interreligious community' where tolerance of others people's beliefs and religions was a priority (Sharpe, 2005: 40).

The phenomenology of religion is now recognised as one of the major twentieth century approaches to the study of religion (Allen, 2005: 183). Different scholars of religion have emphasised different elements of this approach but Douglas Allen (2005: 196) has identified a number of key characteristics of the phenomenology of religion: 'a comparative, systematic, empirical, historical, descriptive discipline and approach; antireductionist claims and its autonomous nature; adoption of philosophical

phenomenological notions of intentionality and *epoche*; insistence on empathy, sympathetic understanding, and religious commitment; and claim to provide insight into essential structures and meanings’.

This research project, as outlined above, will be adopting a broad phenomenological approach whilst also drawing from other historical and sociological approaches. It will also be cognisant of and utilise ideas from recent developments in the phenomenology of religion which include a stress upon the recognition of the diversity of the religious voices of others being studied, more focus on what is concealed and revealed within religious experience and an increased sensitivity to the situatedness of the study (Allen, 2005: 205). Also, whilst this research concentrates upon Muslims in Ireland, the main focus of the research is the experiences and practices rather than the religious beliefs of Muslims living in Ireland, although these will also be covered briefly.

Critics of the phenomenological approach to the study of religion have argued that it is ‘unscientific, highly subjective, and lacking scholarly rigor’ (Allen, 2005: 203). Other arguments against this methodology would suggest that a religion cannot be understood by someone studying it from outside the tradition and that it is impossible to really suspend value judgements and beliefs (Bowman, Herbert & Mumm, 2001: 44). However, Robson points out that ‘it is not obvious what is meant by science or the scientific method’ (1993: 57) and Chalmers (in Robson, 1993: 58) points out that there is no such thing as fully provable scientific knowledge. In addition, the phenomenological approach enables Muslims living in Ireland to describe their experiences from their own point of

view and in their own words which this research suggests is vital if their experiences are to be truly understood. It can be said that the approach 'is believer centred and fair' (Bowman, Herbert & Mumm, 2001: 44). Whilst the researcher will attempt to suspend any value judgements on whether these experiences, beliefs or perceptions are true or false, there will also be an acknowledgement of the background of the researcher and an awareness of the assumptions being brought to the study. As pointed out earlier, the intermediate ontological viewpoint adopted by this researcher is that reality does exist but what is important is the individual's interpretation of reality which is constructed in their own minds and therefore it is argued that the phenomenological approach is the method best suited to a study of Islam in Ireland.

## Methods

Ake Hultkrantz described methods 'as the crutches of science' (in Sharpe, 2005: 41) and Eric J. Sharpe (2005: 41) warns against students of religion spending too much time studying other people's methods and having little time left for the actual study of religion. This study aims to take heed of this advice with less discussion of the methods and more use of them.

The phenomenological approach which is linked with qualitative rather than quantitative methods of data collection is adopted in this study. Quantitative techniques are concerned with data that is measurable and numerically based whilst qualitative techniques involve data that relies on language and the interpretation of meaning. These in turn are linked to specific ontological and epistemological positions. Quantitative research is usually based

on a positivist epistemology and an objectivist ontology in that reality is regarded as an objective fact whilst qualitative research is linked to a rejection of positivism and to a constructionist ontology where reality is believed to be constructed by consciousness (Walliman, 2006: 36-7).

Quantitative and qualitative strategies are often viewed as being mutually exclusive and at polar opposites of a spectrum. However, Bryman (in Walliman, 2006: 37) warns against such a clear cut division between the two strategies and the linked philosophical traditions. This particular study whilst focusing on qualitative methods of data collection will also include some quantitative data taken from official statistics and other secondary sources. However, it is suggested that qualitative methods are particularly suited to this study which concerns itself primarily with description, experiences and beliefs as these cannot be measured in any quantifiable way.

## Qualitative research

Qualitative research covers a wide range of approaches and methods. There is a general consensus however that it is an approach that is naturalistic and interpretative and is concerned with the way people understand and interpret their social reality (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 3). It allows for the exploration of the 'rich texture' of everyday social life and is concerned with meanings rather than measurement (Yates, 2004: 134). It is therefore most suited to a study of Islam in Ireland and the experiences of Muslims living in Ireland.

The functions of qualitative research are also diverse. Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 27) identify four key functions: contextual, explanatory, evaluative and generative. This particular study falls primarily into the 'contextual' category in that it is concerned with exploring and describing participants understanding of phenomena as experienced by the respondents and expressed in their own words and in fine-tuned detail (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 27). However, aspects of the other functions are also covered albeit in lesser detail. This focus on the contextual function ties in with the phenomenological approach 'which is concerned first and foremost with human experience', with descriptive accounts and understanding participants experiences from their own perspectives (Denscombe, 2003: 97).

Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 34-35) differentiate between qualitative data that is naturally occurring and therefore allows investigation in natural settings and qualitative data that is generated through the intervention of research and reconstructed by the participants for the purposes of the research. Generated data gives insight into people's views, interpretations and descriptions about their experiences, beliefs and behaviours. It is therefore suitable for this study as it gives participants a chance to convey their own meanings and interpretations. This again is compatible with the phenomenological approach being taken in this study.

## Method of data collection – the in-depth interview

There are a number of methods for conducting phenomenological research, However, it has been suggested that the interview is 'the most powerful means for attaining an in-

depth understanding of another person's experiences' (Kvale in Thompson, Locander, Pollio: 138). Therefore, the type of generated data selected for use in this research is the in-depth interview and this has been chosen in preference to focus groups for a number of reasons: the type of data sought, the subject area, and the nature of the study group. These three factors are identified by Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 57) as instrumental for informing decisions on which of the two types of generated data is more suitable for the research project.

The nature of the data sought in this study focuses on the individual and their personal experiences and perspectives about being a Muslim in Ireland. In-depth interviews were chosen as the most suitable method of generating data for this study as it is 'the only way to collect data where it is important to set the perspectives heard within the context of personal history or experience; where delicate or complex issues need to be explored at a detailed level, or where it is important to relate different issues to individual personal circumstances' (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 58).

The subject matter of this study is religion which is often perceived as being a personal and sensitive topic and area of discussion. Although Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 58) suggest that sensitive areas can be explored in group settings they do include the proviso that if the topic is perceived to be confidential or an area predominated by social norms, then it would be better explored through interview situations. Group settings could inhibit respondents from expressing their deepest views and concerns about religion as these may not be socially acceptable or may be controversial, therefore it was decided that a

proper exploration of the subject matter could be conducted more thoroughly through an in-depth interview situation.

The in-depth interview was also chosen because of factors relating to the research population and the location of the participants. Information is included from individuals who are located in different parts of Ireland, therefore it would have been difficult to identify and organise a location suitable for all participants if a focus group was being used. Also the research population is very diverse with individuals from different sects and countries and with different beliefs and practices. Although the group would all consider themselves to be Muslims, the diversity amongst the participants in a group situation could inhibit free and open discussions. Issues of power or status are also identified by Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 59) as factors which may inhibit the contribution of participants. This study includes the participation of religious leaders alongside lay people and the inclusion of both men and women from a religion where gender roles are clearly defined. These considerations were also instrumental in choosing the in-depth interview as the most suitable method of generating data for this project.

The quantitative and qualitative approaches are linked with either fixed or flexible design strategies respectively (Robson in Walliman, 2006: 42). Fixed designs are usually carefully mapped out in advance of the research being undertaken whilst flexible design strategies evolve during data collection (Walliman, 2006: 42). This study adopts a flexible design strategy as it was envisaged that initial findings would shape the progress of the research. It is also based around a case study design.

## Case study design

The case study design involves the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case which can be a community, group or organisation and where the researcher is concerned to elucidate the unique features of the case (Bryman, 2004: 48-9). This particular research is concerned with the case study of Muslims in Ireland.

Robson (1993: 162-163) identifies a set of skills that are required by any researcher undertaking a case-study. These include the need for an inquisitive mind, good listening, adaptiveness and flexibility, a grasp of the issues involved, a lack of bias and an openness to contradictory evidence. These are all skills that the researcher is bringing to the research and which were further developed during the course of the research.

According to Robson (1993: 150), the design of a case study involves developing a conceptual framework, a set of research questions, a sampling strategy and a decision on methods and instruments for data collection. These four aspects will now be examined.

## Conceptual framework

Robson (1993: 150) describes a conceptual framework as a framework that 'covers the main features (aspects, dimensions, factors, variables) of a case study and their presumed relationships'. These recommendations have been adopted in order to draw up two separate frameworks that, firstly, chronologically plan the research route (figure 4.1) and,



secondly, outline the main areas and sub-topics that will be investigated through interviewing (see figure 4.2).

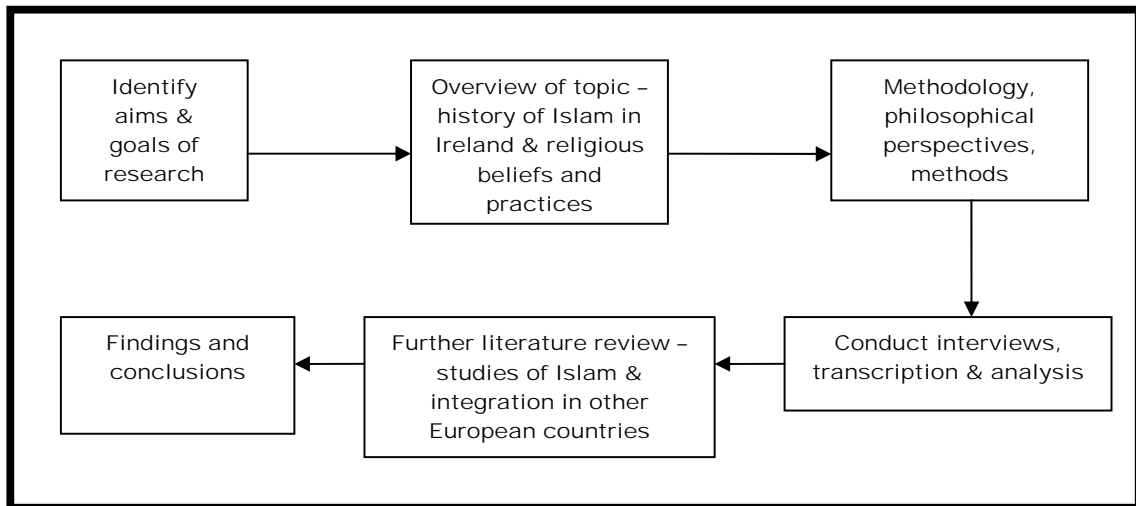


Figure 4.1: Planned route of research

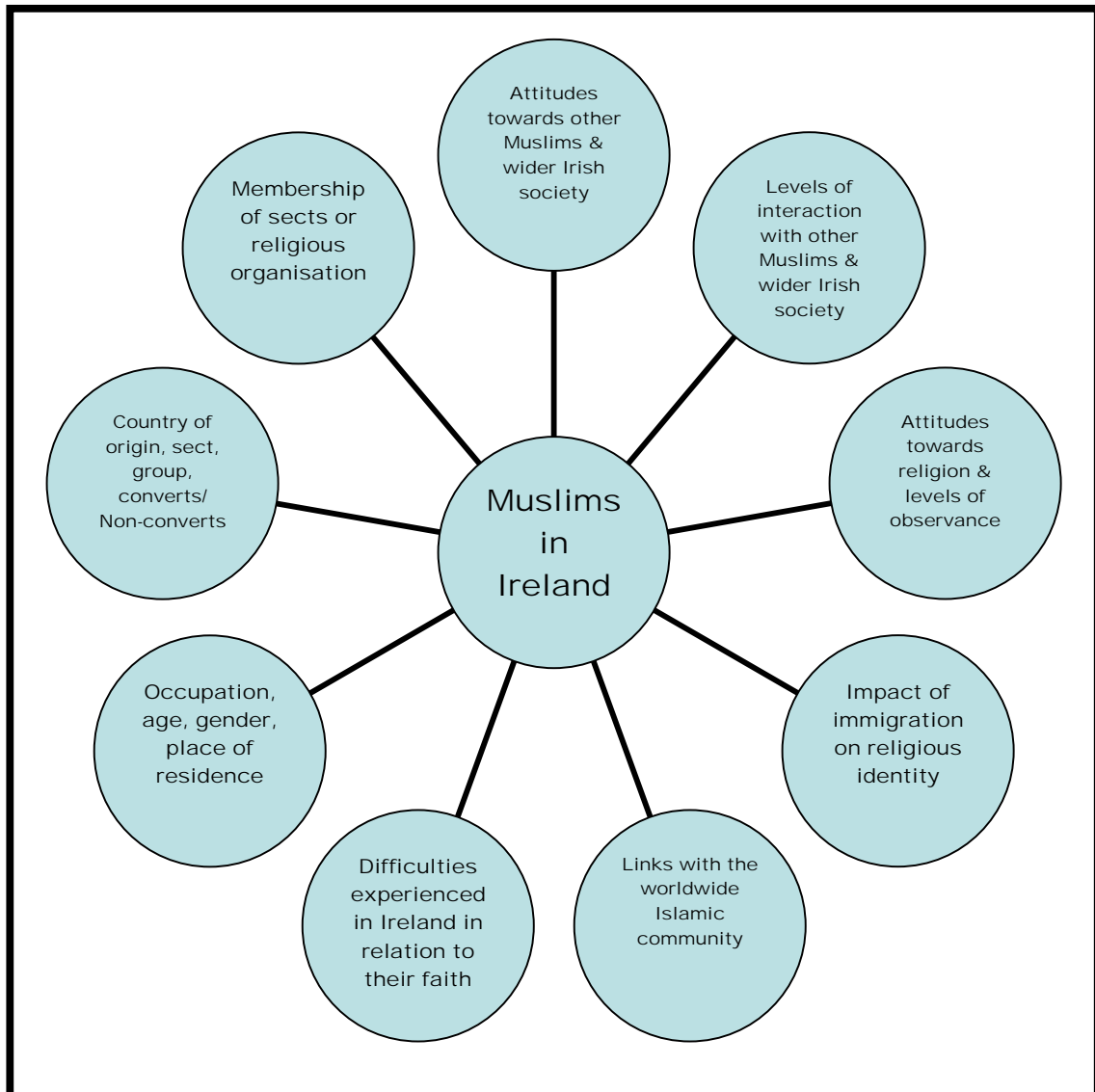


Figure 4.2: Conceptual framework of topic and sub-topics to be explored through interviews

## Research questions

The conceptual framework is linked with the research questions and as can be seen from Figure 4.2 there are questions relating to specific quantifiable variables (such as age, length of time in Ireland, membership of sects etc.) and qualitative questions focusing on

experiences and attitudes. The quantifiable variables have been included as these provide important background information. However, it is important to note that the main focus of this study is qualitative and based around the experiences and attitudes of Muslims in Ireland towards a variety of factors.

There were four main research questions at the outset of this study:

1. What are the attitudes, behaviour and feelings of Muslims living in Ireland towards their religion and towards Irish society?
2. What difficulties have Muslims in Ireland experienced in the practice of their religion?
3. What is the link between Muslims in Ireland and the world-wide Islamic community?
4. How has Islamic identity changed for Muslims who have immigrated to Ireland?

However, these were supplemented by questions relating to the history, diversity, experiences and practices of Muslims in Ireland. As the research advanced these questions were fine-tuned and the focus of the research in the post-interview, post analysis stage shifted to one main question:

- What challenges do Muslims in Ireland face in relation to the practice of their religion and their integration with the wider Irish society?

## Sampling strategy

There are over thirty-two thousand Muslims living in Ireland so it would not be feasible or possible to collect data from every single member of the population under investigation. Therefore the research required a sample for studying. This involved choosing a sampling strategy. There is a key distinction between probability and non-probability sampling strategies and although both have strengths, their suitability for any particular research depend upon on the research aim and methods. Non-probability sampling is used in this study but both sampling strategies are briefly examined here in order to show the considerations that informed the decision making process.

The aim of probability sampling is to reproduce a small-scale and representative model of the population being studied. It is so named because units in the population have a known and equal probability of being chosen. It is 'generally held to be the most rigorous approach to sampling for statistical research, but is largely inappropriate for qualitative research' (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003: 77).

A non-probability sampling strategy involves choosing samples because they have particular characteristics or features of interest to the research which allows for exploration of the main aims and objectives of the study (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003: 77). The key characteristic of non-probability sampling is that the selected sample will not be a random selection (Denscombe, 2003: 15) and, unlike in probability sampling, the sample is not meant to be statistically representative.

This study used a non-probability sampling strategy which allowed the researcher to choose samples according to the specific characteristics or features of interest to the study. This allowed for what is sometimes called ‘symbolic representation’ as each unit ‘is chosen to both ‘represent’ and ‘symbolise’ features of relevance to the investigation’ (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003: 83). It also allowed the selection of diverse samples from across the population in order to capture the diversity inherent within the population and this enabled the identification of the full range of factors relevant to a study of Muslims in Ireland.

## Sampling frame

Regardless of whether probability or non-probability sampling is being utilised, once the study population has been identified the researcher needs to consider the sample frame from which the sample can be selected (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003: 88). ‘A sampling frame is an objective list of ‘the population’ from which the researcher can make his or her selections’ and it should contain a complete up-to-date list of everyone in the population (Denscombe, 2003: 17).

There is no existing sample frame of Muslims living in Ireland. This means that a sample frame needed to be specifically generated for this study. A number of methods were utilised in order to do this but the focus was on a snowballing technique. This involved seeking initial contact with Muslims through Islamic organisations or other institutions or groups or individuals. These Muslims then gave the names of more Muslims. This was

combined with a convenience sample which draws upon contacts made through friends and family.

It is important to bear in mind that the use of snowball sampling techniques could mean that access to respondents through Islamic organisations and mosques has been controlled by 'gatekeepers'. This would mean a potential for bias as gatekeepers could purposely choose participants who are more likely to give a positive account of the organisation or their experiences (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003: 94). Denscombe (2003: 92) points out that the influence of gatekeepers continues even after the granting or denial of contact with research subjects. Access 'is renewable and renegotiable' and therefore the gatekeeper's influence can persist into the research. The snowballing technique was therefore complemented by convenience sampling which was used in order to contact non-practising Muslims who were not accessible through religious organisations.

## Sampling criteria

In a non-probability sample, 'units are deliberately selected to reflect particular features of groups within the sampled population' (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003: 78). Following on from a literature review and from initial contacts with Islamic organisations, groups and individuals, a purposive sampling approach was adopted. This involved selecting subjects who 'are chosen with a 'purpose' to represent a location or type in relation to a key criterion' (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003: 78-79). This ensured that key criteria were covered and that there was diversity within each of these key criteria.

The criteria that were originally considered for purposive selection in this study were:

- Levels of integration with Irish society
- Affiliation to a sect or mosque
- Country of origin
- Age
- Gender
- Length of stay in Ireland
- Regional location
- Employment activity

This study is primarily concerned with the experiences of Muslims living in Ireland and their interaction with the wider Irish society. However, the sample criteria relating to integration could only be determined through the process of research; therefore the criteria relating to levels of integration was eliminated at the outset and the other variables were prioritised according to what was deemed the most important. This was a complex decision making process that involved detailed consideration of the literature review and the aims and objectives of the study. Purposive samples ‘are designed to be as diverse as possible, including all key groups and constituencies’ (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003: 107) so a number of factors had to be taken into consideration. It was decided that the primary criteria would relate to ‘affiliation to a mosque or sect’ and ‘country of origin’ as this would allow for a cross section of Muslims from diverse cultural backgrounds. Gender, length of stay in Ireland and socio-economic background were chosen as secondary criteria. It was decided that between one and five Muslims

spanning age groups, gender and their number of years in Ireland from each of the following groups would be interviewed:

- Waterford mosque on hospital grounds
- Waterford Nigerian mosque
- Dublin Shii mosque
- Dublin Sunni mosque linked with Arab Muslims
- Dublin mosque linked with South Asian Muslims
- Dublin mosque linked with Nigerians
- The Galway mosque
- The Ahmadiyya mosque in Galway
- Muslims not affiliated with any particular mosques

It is important to note that a number of participants had concerns about the inclusion of a member of the Ahmadiyya community in this research. These participants expressed the view that they did not consider Ahmadiyyas to be Muslims. However, it was decided to include a member of the Ahmadiyya community as Ahmadiyyas consider themselves to be Muslims. The inclusion also ties in with the phenomenological approach which attempts to steer clear of value judgements in relation to beliefs or experiences.

Robson (1993: 155) says that sampling also requires decisions relating to where people will be interviewed, when they will be interviewed and what questions are to be asked. The interviews were all face-to-face and were conducted in a place chosen or agreed upon by the interviewees – mainly in people’s homes or religious institutions as this



provided a location that was familiar and comfortable for the interviewee. All of the interviews were conducted during the day with the time of interview based on what was convenient to the interviewee.

## Data collection techniques

Robson (1993: 157) states that there is an expectation that case studies will involve a range of techniques of data collection. However, he stresses that there are 'no absolute answers' as to the ideal way to approach data collection. This research focused primarily on interviews but also used documentary research using data from newspapers, official statistics and television and radio broadcasts.

## Topic guide

Arthur and Nazroo (2003: 112) point out that it is important to consider the order that issues and topics will be discussed during the data collection stage. This involves drawing up a topic guide (sometimes called an interview schedule or interview guide) which outlines the key issues and topics to be explored. The topic guide 'should be seen as a mechanism for steering the discussion in an interview or focus group but *not* as an exact prescription of coverage' (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003: 115). It could therefore be described as a flexible framework for data collection which provides the interviewer with a structure but also allows for adaptability according to the circumstances and dynamic of each interview situation. The topic guide also provides a valuable documentation of the fieldwork process (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003: 115).

Arthur and Nazroo (2003) suggest a number of general principles that can be taken into consideration in drawing up a topic guide. These include starting with straightforward questions to ease respondents into the interview situation, moving from general to more specific topics, moving from questions about experiences to questions about reasonings and attitudes, winding down the interview with a discussion about the future (see figure 4.3).

STAGES OF DISCUSSION IN INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS
<p style="text-align: center;">Introduction</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Easy, opening questions; more surface level Background and contextual information Definitional question</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Core part of interview or group discussion – questioning and discussion is more in-depth Move from circumstantial to attitudinal/evaluative/explanatory questions Move from general to more specific Follow chronological order</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Winding down Question looking to the future, suggestions</p>

Figure 4.3 - Stages of discussion in interviews and focus groups (from Arthur and Nazroo, 2003: 114)

The topic guide was therefore divided up into sections concerned with facts relating to experiences and life history, descriptions of events and behaviours, and beliefs and attitudes. Robson (1993: 228) states that information about facts and behaviour are relatively easy to access although there can be errors related to lapses in memory or response biases whilst beliefs and attitudes are ‘relatively difficult to get at’ and are often complex and multi-dimensional and easily affected by the wording of the question. The opening stages of the data collection process were therefore concerned with facts and behaviour whilst questions relating to attitudes and beliefs were left to a later stage.

## Interviews

Interviews are described by Fulcher and Scott (1999: 89) as conversations with a purpose. This research used semi-structured interviews where there was a check-list of topics and questions but the order and way they were approached depended upon the flow of conversation which was unique in each situation. The interviewer aimed to maintain detachment from the interviewee in line with Schutz's idea of adopting the 'vantage point of the stranger' and also in keeping with the concept of phenomenological *epoché*.

The interviews were recorded using a mini-disc recorder. Notes on any extraneous non-audio details were recorded but after the interview in order to minimise distraction.

Interviews were then transcribed. This was a lengthy process and Bryman (in Walliman, 2006: 93) estimates that for every hour of recorded speech it takes five to six hours of transcription. However, recording and transcription is a very reliable method of data collection as it is possible to check exactly what is said. Heritage (in Bryman, 2004: 330) suggests that the recording and transcription of interviews offers a number of other advantages including the fact that it allows for the material to be re-listened to any number of times and opens the data up to further scrutiny.

There are many complexities involved in using interviews as a method of data collection. Potential difficulties include the impossibility of entirely ruling out bias, the time consuming nature of interviews (in terms of planning, recording and transcribing) and also that the people who agree to participate and be interviewed may not necessarily be

representative of the case being studied. It is also possible that the interviewer will be influenced by the behaviour and attitude of the interviewee and that the interviewee will be affected by the interviewer and result in what is termed the 'interview effect'. Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 65) point out that there is an argument, put forward by some, that in order to reduce the interview effect the researcher and participant should be 'matched' on key socio-demographic criteria.

Matching characteristics such as gender, cultural background, ethnicity or age would no doubt yield very different results to a research project where these characteristics do not match. However, due to time and financial limitations, the interviews being carried out as part of this study were conducted by the same interviewer regardless of the diverse characteristics of the interviewees. Therefore it has to be acknowledged that there is a likelihood of an interview effect and the age, gender, dress and accent of the interviewer may have influenced the response of the participant.

One option to limit the interview effect would be to limit interviews to participants whose characteristics most closely match the interviewer. This however, would result in a significant sacrifice regarding the diversity of participants. Therefore, whilst this research acknowledges the possibility of an interview effect, no attempt has been made to match the characteristics of researcher and participant, a process which can also have negative consequences.

Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 66) point out that matching characteristics also has its drawbacks and can lead to insufficient information being given due to assumptions based on shared experiences. They also suggest that the discussion of sensitive issues may work better when the interviewer is from outside the participant's community or group and they state that matching characteristics is no substitute for high quality fieldwork skills. Sensitive issues include topics relating to religion. Therefore, the fact that this research was conducted by someone outside the participant's community may indeed have yielded richer and more accurate information.

There were incidents where the gender and the fact that the interviewer was an outsider had an impact on the interview process. These included one interview with a female participant who said that knowing about sexual relationships makes her feel bad and she does not feel comfortable when people in Ireland talk about it in front of her or when she sees people kissing. However, she said that because the researcher was female she felt comfortable discussing the situation. Another incident was during an interview with a young male Muslim who left the door of the room open throughout the interview and explained afterwards that this was because in a room where a man and a woman are alone together, that he believes that Satan is also present. And in one other instance during an email communication, a man questioned the motives of the researcher and asked which intelligence agency she worked for.

Codes of good practice were applied throughout the interviewing process including those recommended by Robson (1993: 232): a researcher focus on listening rather than

speaking; putting questions in a clear, straightforward, non-threatening way; eliminating cues which may elicit a particular response; and enjoying (or in the words of Robson at least 'appearing to enjoy') the process. The interviewer adopted Robson's (1993: 232-3) advice regarding the types of questions to avoid in interviews: long; double-barrelled; those including jargon; leading; biased.

Thompson, Locander and Pollio (1989: 138) state that the aim of a phenomenological interview is to get 'a first-person description of some specified domain of experience' and that the only set questions regarding the topic should be the opening question. However, a topic guide was drawn up for the purposes of this research and although the interviews flowed differently according to each situation, there was a set of predetermined topics that was used to steer the direction of the interview and guide the exploration of the key themes.

The interviews were semi-structured and they utilised devices such as probes and prompts to encourage interviewees to expand on topics or give more information when required. Before beginning the interview, informed consent was obtained and the interview process began with an introduction by the researcher to the purpose of the research, an explanation of the way the interview would be conducted and recorded, and an assurance to the respondent of complete confidentiality. The interview was recorded from this point on and started with easy non-threatening questions, moved to the main body of the interview with any difficult questions left towards the end. Interviews finished up with a look towards the future and a final word of thanks.

The key focus of phenomenological interviews is to garner rich descriptive accounts of lived experiences which enables others to understand how phenomena are experienced. This research focuses on the lived experiences of Muslims living in Ireland. The interviews focused on the description of specific events, experiences and feelings of the interviewees and therefore descriptive questions were used rather than 'why' questions. According to Thompson, Locander and Pollio (1989: 138) 'why' questions are 'often ineffective for generating descriptions of lived experiences' and can also 'engender feelings of prejudgment and defensive responses' (Argyris in Thompson, Locander, Pollio: 138). Kvale (1996: 131) suggests that many 'why' questions can lead to intellectualized interviews that evoke memories of examinations. The focus of the interviews was therefore on descriptions of their lived experiences, in line with a phenomenological approach.

Twenty-one semi-structured interviews were carried out by one female interviewer. The interviewees were first asked to give some details about their current circumstances and their backgrounds. They were also asked to talk about religion in their lives, what it feels like to be a Muslim living in Ireland, whether they were born here or immigrated, their reasons for immigrating, their first impressions of the country, early memories of life in Ireland, their interaction with other Muslims and with Irish people, difficulties they encounter in Ireland specifically relating to the practicing of their religion, their friendships, family life, social life, how it feels to be part of a worldwide Islamic

community, their hopes for the future direction of Islam in Ireland. (The full topic guide is outlined in Appendix D).

## Evaluation of research

Bryman (2004: 28) states that there are three prominent criteria for evaluating the results of any social research: reliability, replication and validity. These criteria refer to the fact that results should be repeatable, the study should be replicable and the conclusions should be valid. However, some writers suggest that different criteria should be used for the evaluation of qualitative research (Bryman, 2004: 30 & p273).

Lincoln and Guba (in Bryman, 2004: 274) say that the criteria for evaluating quantitative data presupposes that there is one correct view of social reality and that there are absolute truths which can be uncovered by social research. This would mean the evaluation criteria of reliability, replication and validity would contradict the ontological and epistemological positions adopted in this study. Lincoln and Guba (in Bryman, 2004: 273) suggest that there can be more than one version of social reality and they have suggested that qualitative research be evaluated according to the alternative criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity.

According to this criteria trustworthiness can be further broken down into four: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Guba and Lincoln (in Bryman, 2004: 274-275) say credibility involves good research practice, respondent validation (e.g. checking transcriptions with interviewees to confirm findings), and



triangulation (e.g. checking observations against the interview responses). Transferability involves providing rich descriptive accounts of the findings to allow others make judgements about transferability. Dependability involves the suggestion that researchers provide detailed accounts of all phases of the research including how the research participants were chosen and interviewed and confirmability refers to the fact that researchers should show that they acted in good faith and did not overtly use their own personal values and opinions to sway the findings. The other criteria of authenticity aims to judge the fairness and authenticity of the research and to question if the research aids understanding of the social world (Bryman, 2004: 275).

However, it is argued here that the evaluative criteria suggested by Guba and Lincoln are also problematic. Bryman (2004: 274) points out that respondent validation may result in interviewees altering their original statements and censoring the findings. Triangulation presupposes that strict observational accounts or other methods of data collection will be used along with interviews when much qualitative research (including this study) focuses particularly on one form of data collection and therefore triangulation is not possible or very limited, especially when there are considerable time constraints. Also, the criteria of transferability involves subjective judgements based on the descriptive accounts supplied by the researcher which could also prove problematic as there is no way to measure these accounts or to decide what exactly constitutes whether or not a study is transferable.

It is suggested that the most appropriate evaluative criteria for this particular research project is 'validity'. This methodological criteria is linked with the ideographic method

being used in this study. The knowledge being generated from this project can be said to be valid, in the sense that it is 'true to life in a particular place and time' although it may be difficult to replicate (Smith, 1998: 145). This is in contrast to reliable knowledge which is linked with the nomothetic method and which involves evidence that is 'supported through repeated testing under the same condition' (Smith, 1998: 145). However, the research was carried out according to the canons of good practice and the researcher adopted the 'auditing' approach suggested by Guba and Lincoln (in Bryman, 2004: 275) where detailed accounts of the research process were kept to show the dependability of the findings. It is also suggested that the findings are fair and will help others understand the experiences and beliefs of Muslims in Ireland. This would comply with the criteria of authenticity suggested by Guba and Lincoln for qualitative research (in Bryman, 2004: 275).

However, it is also necessary to be aware that the validity of the research may be compromised by factors which are beyond the control of the researcher. These include the Hawthorne effect which refers to the way people tend to respond differently when they are aware that they are the subject of a research project (Walliman, 2006: 107). The effect is named after research carried out by Roethlisberger and Dickson in 1939 at the Hawthorne electrical works in Chicago when the researchers found that the presence of an observer affected the productivity of workers who were wiring electrical components (Fulcher & Scott, 1999: 88). There is also a possibility of an interview effect where the characteristics of the interviewer affects the response of the interviewee. There is evidence that female interviewers achieve a better rapport with interviewees than their

male counterparts but also that at times the presence of a woman is believed to be more intrusive (Fulcher & Scott, 1999: 88). This could be particularly true in the study of Islam where gender roles are often clearly defined and a female interviewer could affect the way questions are answered by either male or female respondents depending on their view of gender roles. Another possible difficulty impacting upon the validity of the research is language and cultural differences between the interviewer and interviewees. For example, when a person's first language is not English, they may have difficulty communicating subtle shades of meaning or difference.

## Content analysis

Once the interviews were conducted and transcribed, the next step was the analysis and synthesis of the information. O'Leary (2005: 163) identifies the goals of this phase of research in a phenomenological study as the exploration 'of commonalities and divergences in the experience of the same phenomenon' and to search out the range of experiences related to this phenomenon.

The transcription of interviews generated a large quantity of data which needed to be analysed. Lofland and Lofland (in Bryman, 2004: 332) suggest that the process of analysis should begin before all interviews are completed. Early analysis enables the researcher to identify emerging themes that may be followed up in subsequent interviews (Bryman, 2004: 332). This results in an iterative process as the researcher goes between data collection and data analysis with both phases informing the other.

Bryman (2004: 339) points out that there are only a few established and accepted rules in the analysis of qualitative data but that there are a number of broad guidelines which can be followed. These include the analysis of data at an early stage in the data collection process and the coding of the interview transcripts to identify key themes and the range of issues identified by the interviewees (Bryman, 2004: 399-409).

The phenomenological method adopted for this research results in a number of challenges in the analysis of the data, not least of which is the difficulty, pointed out by O'Leary (2005: 164-165) in finding good advice regarding the use of phenomenological methods. O'Leary suggests two possible approaches. The first is to start by delving into literature on the subject whilst the second is to do less reading and to focus on the practice of thinking phenomenologically and to search for themes in the collected data. This latter approach was adopted in this study with a focus on discovering themes and commonalities of experiences relating to what it is like to be a Muslim living in Ireland. The use of coding was used to aid this process.

The coding of the material generated in the data collection and transcription phase began after the first seven interviews were conducted and transcribed. A few basic considerations suggested by Bryman (2004: 408-409) were then followed. These included reading through the initial set of transcripts to get a sense of the material and then taking notes about what struck the researcher as most significant, then following this up by subsequent readings and inserting notes in the margin and identifying basic codes which were then reviewed. Interview material was then extracted according to themes

and re-compiled in sections that were further analysed, broken down into smaller components and then re-stitched together under a broad heading with analysis and quotes. In some instances the researcher made alterations to sentence constructions (including the extraction of repetitive words) in order to make the meaning clear. Subsections were categorized and compiled under larger section headings and a clearer picture emerged of the key themes from which conclusions were then drawn up.

## Ethical issues

At the outset, the research was presented to the Research Ethics Committee at Waterford Institute of Technology who approved the project. The research also complies with the ethical guidelines set out by the Sociological Association of Ireland. According to the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003, the type of information that has been gathered and processed during this research is termed 'sensitive personal data' as it will refer to the religious beliefs of the subjects and may also refer to political opinions, philosophical beliefs and the sexual life of the subject.

All the data collation, storage and processing has complied with sections 2 and 2A of the Data Protection Act (as amended by the Act of 2003) and all data subjects gave consent to the processing. Interviewees are anonymous and no records have been kept of interviews with names on them unless a participant has specifically stated that their name can be included. Recorded material and interview transcripts have been kept in a locked filing cabinet and the only people with access to these were the researcher and research supervisor.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the philosophy regarding the ontological, epistemological and theoretical stance of the researcher and has outlined why an intermediate approach has been adopted. This approach attempts to bridge the gap between the objective and subjective, between empiricism and rationalism and between positivism and interpretivism. This ties in with the phenomenological approach used in this study which involves a focus on the beliefs and experiences of the participants from their own perspective and in their own words whilst at the same time steering clear from value judgements. The chapter also explored the qualitative method of semi-structured in-depth interviews used for data collection and outlined the conceptual framework, research design and sampling strategy used as well as outlining the evaluation of the research, the method of content analysis and the ethical guidelines.

## Chapter 5: Unity and Diversity

And it too was hopeless: what was a person to do when even *things* in England spoke a different language than the one they did back in Pakistan? In England the heart said *boom boom* instead of *dhak dhak*; a gun said *bang!* instead of *that!*; things fell with a ‘thud’ not a *dharmā*; small bells said ‘jingle’ instead of *chaan-chaan*; the trains said ‘choo choo’ instead of *chuk chuk*...

(Aslam, 2004: p35-36)

### Introduction

This chapter gives a brief outline of the interviewees, the interview process and limitations of the research. It then goes on to outline significant diversities present within the Muslim population as well as participants’ subjective views about diversity. The findings would suggest that a range of factors contribute to a growing diversity within the Muslim population of Ireland. As Fokas (2007: 2) suggests, dichotomous representations of Islam which tend to simplify differences are insufficient in a study of this nature. Factors that contribute to the diversity of the Muslim population in Ireland include whether Muslims are autochthonous or immigrant, their length of stay in Ireland, the origin of immigrants, gender differences, subjective conceptions of identity and integration as well as primary social spheres and levels of integration. Findings support those of McPhee (2005: 51) who suggests outsider and government views of the Muslim

population as a homogenous community are not correct and that the Muslim population is in fact diverse and heterogeneous with multiple layers of identity and affiliations.

## Interviewees

A total of twenty-one Muslims living in Ireland were interviewed. The interviewees were chosen to represent a range of criteria which included nationality, age, gender, length of time in Ireland and their place of habitation in Ireland. (Table 5.1 outlines the criteria and their relation to each participant). A number of religious leaders, laypeople and non-practicing Muslims were also interviewed. There are very few full-time religious leaders or Imams in Ireland so many of the Imams interviewed worked full-time in other professions.

As mentioned previously, in 2006 the researcher of this project had produced a series of radio programmes on the subject of Islam in Ireland. During the making of this series, contact was made with a number of Muslims living in Ireland and extensive interviews were recorded. However, due to the time and financial limitations of radio broadcasting, only tiny segments of these recordings were included in the final series of programmes. At the outset of this research, contact was made with many of the Muslims who had been interviewed for the radio series. The aims and purposes of the research were explained to them. All of those who were contacted agreed to be interviewed again specifically for this research and also gave permission for the researcher to use of any material that had previously been recorded. A number of other Muslims were identified using snowballing and convenience sampling techniques. All participants signed consent forms (see



Appendix B and Appendix C) agreeing to their participation in the research and all were informed that they could opt out of the research at any stage.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>
Akifah	F	20s	Pakistan
Imran	*M	40s	Ireland (convert)
Afsheen	*F	30s	Syria
Wasim	*M	30s	UK (family of Pakistani origin)
Alina	F	20s	Pakistan
Aahil	M	30s	Libya
Hanif	M	20s	Democratic Republic of Congo
Khurram	*M	50s	Syria
Kamran	* M	30s	Pakistan/The Netherlands
Samir	* M	30s	Pakistan
Wahab	M	60s	Pakistan/The UK
Mahnoor	F	60s	The UK
Aiman	M	20s	Irish – father Egyptian
Rafidah	* F	50s	Irish convert
Nazeer	M	30s	Pakistan
Muhib	M	30s	Nigeria
Alim	M	60s	South Africa
Dinar	M	30s	Nigeria
Sayyid	** M	40s	Iraq
Fakeeh	* M	40s	Nigeria
Kaleem	** M	30s	Egypt

TABLE 5.1: RESEARCH INTERVIEWEES

\* Information taken from interviews conducted for radio programmes and an additional interview conducted for the research project

\*\* Interview material taken from interviews conducted for radio programmes

Some interviewees requested the presence of their partner or a friend during the interview which was agreed. However, this did sometimes impact upon the interview. In one instance a Muslim woman sat in for an interview with a male acquaintance who she had introduced to the researcher. The man spoke about things that had been stolen from his family's unoccupied house in the town. The woman intervened saying 'there's no need

actually to say these things. Somethings you have to keep private'. At another point during the same interview the man described some of the Pakistani women living in the town as 'insecure'. The woman again interrupted saying 'they're absolutely lovely, very friendly and very good mothers, and very, lovely wives'. The man then continued describing the women in the same type of positive terms and said 'and they're very socially aware as well and all the women mix as well'.

Another challenge in relation to the interviewing process was the reluctance on the part of some people to speak openly about their experiences. One man in particular felt he could not speak about some aspects of his life which may have been deemed unacceptable by the rest of the local Muslim community. In relation to drinking alcohol he said 'you see I can't really talk about this because I'm meant to be... I do a lot of work for everybody and people respect me here.' However, when he was reassured that anything he said would be completely anonymous he did speak openly about his drinking habits. Another man appeared reluctant to speak about the Ahmadiyya community. He was asked if he did not want to speak about it. He said 'no, I do not want to speak about that'.

The researcher also encountered suspicion about her motives for the research project. In one instance in 2008 a man who himself initiated contact after listening to the radio programmes online sent an email to the researcher asking who did she work for and for what intelligence agency did she want the information for. She explained the background and purpose to the research and assured him that the information was not being collected

for any intelligence agency or indeed for any organisation. The researcher subsequently asked another interviewee about the suspicion she had encountered:

The Muslims sometimes they feel vulnerable and because of that if someone comes to them and asks them these detailed questions they need to ask this question – ‘what does she want?’ They have seen a lot of bad experience. We have seen on the screen a lot of media people or people who pretended to be media people and then after that they turn out to be part of intelligence or planning to do a scandal for Muslims somewhere or things like that. That created a low level of trust when it comes to people asking for detailed questions.

None of the participants’ real names have been used. The researcher has chosen Islamic names to represent the interviewees. Details of the interviewees including the names used and their meanings, their ages, gender are included in Table 5.1.

## Limitations

Whilst this research aims to document the lived experiences of Muslims living in Ireland it is important to acknowledge the limitations of a study of this nature. Firstly, due to time and financial constraints only a small sample of Muslims were interviewed and because of the huge diversity of the Muslim population in Ireland not all groups, nationalities or schools of thought are represented in this sample. Secondly, as Heckmann (2005: 21) points out in his study of integration in France, Great Britain and Germany, the fact that participants took part in the research could indicate that these Muslims are already integrated to some level whilst those who are less integrated or more isolated in Irish society were more difficult to contact. Therefore, the results of the research may be skewed in that direction. Also, as a female, Irish, non-Muslim researcher, it is necessary to acknowledge that the gender, nationality and religious background of the researcher

may have influenced the responses of the interviewees. The research is also limited temporally as it relates to Muslims living in Ireland at a particular point in time. Because of the rapid growth and resulting changes of the Muslim community in Ireland, the findings will relate specifically to this stage in the community's development. Despite these limitations, however, the research has uncovered rich and detailed information relating to the lived experiences of Muslims living in Ireland. Whilst more research is needed in the area, this study goes some way towards elucidating some of the difficulties, challenges and experiences of Muslims living in Ireland and will contribute to a greater understanding of Muslims and Islam in Ireland's growing multi-cultural society. The findings can also be used to understand the experiences of other minority groups and immigrants and point to some of the potential difficulties they may encounter upon arriving in Ireland.

## Unity in Islam

Although Islam is a religion that encompasses a perceptible diversity it is also a religion that exhibits a number of powerful unifying elements. The worldwide Islamic population is united in a number of key beliefs and practices but it is also united by virtue of belonging to the *ummah*, the worldwide Islamic community. This sense of unity acts as a balancing counter-effect to the divisive factors that have sprung up since Islam was founded. Many of those interviewed felt that the unity of Islam by far outweighed the internal divergences. Khurram put it like this:

Islam is one. The person who follows the Koran and the method which the prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) has presented to us, is called a

Muslim. There is no fraction of that. There is no other Islam. There is just one single Islam. That is the basic idea.

The stress on unity and togetherness was also apparent in mosques where Imams stressed the fact that their mosques were open to all Muslims regardless of what sect or school of thought they belonged to. Many participants were reluctant to identify themselves as belonging to any one particular group or sect whilst a smaller number of interviewees were reluctant to acknowledge the existence of any divisions within Islam. Kaleem, for example, said there were no divisions in Islam and all the mosques in Ireland co-operate and work together. When asked about different schools of thought in Ireland he said that he was not aware of any:

You see by and large Islam is Islam. You are either Muslim or a non-Muslim, full stop. To look at Islam from a denominational point of view does not work. We do not have denominations in Islam. It's either Muslim or not a Muslim. I haven't seen any crucial theological differences among the Muslims here in Ireland.

The concept of the *ummah* or worldwide Islamic community which was established by Mohammad in the early years of Islam is a powerful unifying concept (see Chapter 1: 21). The *ummah* unites all believers into a single community regardless of background, culture or social status. Nazeer described it:

Like in a family if one brother is suffering the whole family is suffering. All the Muslims are like brothers to each other. If one brother is in pain all Muslims should feel it.

The sense of belonging to the *ummah* varied. The majority of participants were practicing Muslims who felt a strong sense of belonging to the *ummah*. However, Aiman who grew

up in Ireland and who describes himself as a non-practicing Muslim said that when he is in Ireland he does not have a sense of belonging to the *ummah* but that when he travels to his father's country of origin he does feel very much a part of the international Muslim community.

The sense of belonging to the *ummah* has practical implications which are manifested in a number of ways. At its most basic level, most Muslims interviewed showed an awareness of global events particularly in relation to Islamic countries. They also expressed a sense of solidarity with Muslims facing challenges or difficulties around the world and expressed concern about what was happening in other parts of the Muslim world.

Kamran, for example, said that the war in Iraq makes him feel sad and makes Muslims all over the world feel sad. Muhib said that he feels bad when violence flares up in any part of the world but that he feels particularly bad when it is a country where Muslims live. Nazeer said it is very distressing for him when he hears of Muslims suffering in other countries:

My own brothers are being killed, my sisters are being raped, my children are dying. Sad is not a word I should use, it's very bad. I want to shout, you know, I want to stand somewhere on the high mountains and shout at the people 'for God's sake it is time for you to help your brothers'.

The emotional solidarity expressed by many Muslims in relation to their fellow Muslims across the world often went hand in hand with practical responses. For example, Samir explained that the concept of the *ummah* means that if an injustice is being done to some part of the international Muslim community that the rest of the Muslims should respond in order to alleviate this suffering or oppression by highlighting the issue and helping

them financially. Hanif said he believed that Muslims in Ireland have a responsibility to support Muslims living in the Middle East through prayers and finances and by sending money to the country. Another participant said that difficulties faced by Muslims in Islamic countries were sometimes used to agitate Muslims into anti-Western sentiments and opposition whilst previous research by Brocklesby (2006: 76) found that whilst Muslim students in Ireland were well integrated into their school communities, teachers said Muslim students identified with daily suffering and destruction in Muslim countries including Palestine and Iraq.

Despite the unifying factors outlined above, Islam is not a monolithic unchanging religion and there are perceptible diversities within the religion. This diversity stems from a number of factors including the fact that Islam has sometimes changed according to the geographical, social and cultural context in which it inhabits as well as diversity as a result of divergences of opinion relating to leadership, beliefs, practices and membership of religious organisations. Participants also felt that Muslim experiences in Europe were diverse and that the Muslim population in Ireland had developed differently from other countries. They said it was newer, smaller, more diverse yet more united, less extreme and more educated than Muslim communities in places like the UK, Holland, Germany and France.

## Perceptions of diversity

Participants in this research conceived of the diversity within the Muslim population in a variety of ways. For example, Samir stressed differences related to the length of time in

Ireland identifying three distinct groups of Muslims in this country: the old Irish Muslim, the new Irish Muslim who are second and third generation Muslims, and recent Muslim immigrants. For Rafidah however, nationality was the key feature in explaining the diversity within the Muslim population. She explained that immigrant Muslims have aspects of their culture tied up with their religion in an inextricable web and this creates differences between different cultural groups.

Others stressed the diversity within the Muslim population in terms of education. Wassim, for example, said he believes that educated families try to maintain the ideals and cultural aspects of where they come from but will also absorb what is good around them and become assimilated into the local culture. He said that uneducated families will try to maintain their separateness from the surrounding culture and will have a very insular way of thinking. Wahab, a successful businessman who came to Ireland in the 1970s, also said that education was an important element of diversity. He explained that he often meets Pakistanis who are looking for assistance when they first arrive in Ireland. He said he always tells them that there are three important things for a happy life in Ireland: to be liberal, honest and to integrate:

If the people's background is educated it's very easy to convince them. If the family don't have an educated background or come from a very back part of the country with small villages and don't have good English, then it's very difficult to put these ideas in their heads. Also, if they don't speak much English, that's very difficult to communicate and if you don't have strong communication then a lot of things are misunderstood.

There are many different sects and schools of thought within Islam and these are also present in Ireland. However, most Muslims who were interviewed minimised the



differences between the different sects and groups and many were reluctant to identify themselves as belonging to any specific sect or group or religious organisation. Most did acknowledge the existence of different groups but at the same time stressed that the differences were minor and did not manifest themselves in a visible way.

One religious leader explained that whilst there are many different sects and schools of thought present in Ireland, they all worship side by side:

In Ireland you have Sunnis, you have Wahhabis, you have Naqshbandis, you have Barelwis, you have Deobandi and you have Shii. In Dublin you have the Shii mosque, you have the Clonskeagh mosque. The Clonskeagh mosque itself has mainly Wahhabi,<sup>3</sup> but they have Muslims who go there who are from Naqshbandi, Sufi sects who may be Hannafi, they may be Maliki, they may be Barelwi, Deobandi, they are all there, and there are differences and they are there.

Many of those interviewed acknowledged that the main division within Islam in terms of sects was between Sunni and Shii Islam. However, the differences between these two sects was minimised and participants stressed that members of both of these sects will often worship together in Ireland, particularly outside of Dublin which hosts the only Shii mosque in Ireland. One participant, during a casual unrecorded conversation said he believed the big division amongst the Muslim population in Ireland was between Shii and Sunni Sufis on one hand and Wahhabi or Salafi on the other. He expressed concerns about the growth in numbers of Wahhabis and Salafis and explained that they were recognisable by the fact that the women often wear the *burkha*. He said he was concerned

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<sup>3</sup> A participant who attends the Clonskeagh mosque however said no-one at the mosque was associated with Wahhabism which he said was a political rather than theological approach. He also said he did not think Wahhabism has any existence in Ireland

about their presence and growth as they tended to remain isolated in society and had more extreme views and were often opposed to more moderate groups.

Nazeer initially said that he did not know much about sects in Islam. He explained that the two biggest sects are Shii and Sunni and that he is Sunni and that he followed every school of thought except Shiis. However, when the researcher asked if he could talk a bit about the different groups in Ireland such as 'Deobandi, Barelwi, Wahhabi' he replied smiling 'you know better than me' and then elaborated on the divisions and where he belonged:

I'm a little bit Deobandi, I'm a little bit Wahhabi, I'm not Barelwi, I'm not Shii. Most of my interactions are with Wahhabism and Deobandi... For living my life I would like to prefer Wahhabi. They're very straight, very strict. I want to stick to my religion. Straight means they follow whatever is written, whatever is said. Some of the other ones they find loop holes and maybe it's a little bit relaxed. I don't want that. If you are relaxed you will find another loop hole, but I don't want to find any loop hole.

It was notable in this instance that the participant only elaborated about which school of thought he belonged to once the interviewer exhibited knowledge of the different groups. After this exchange the participant addressed the researcher as 'sister'.

Others who acknowledged the existence of different groups in Ireland stressed that the divisions were not strict. A number of participants said, for example, that Deobandis and Barelwis would go to any mosques in Ireland as there is no separation between the mosques according to groups or religious organisations.

As well as identifying the existence of certain groups within Islam, there were those who identified sects as not belonging to Islam. One Imam explained that he considers a number of groups who identify themselves as Muslim to be non-Muslim:

There is Ismaili which is non-Muslim, there is Druze and I also consider them to be non-Muslims. Ahmadiyya also - I don't consider them to be Muslims.

A number of interviewees talked negatively about the Ahmadiyya sect which numbers about one percent of the Irish Muslim population. One member of the Ahmadiyya community who is an Irish convert talked about the negative response he has got from some of the Imams around the country:

I said to one of them a few months ago 'you know, this is Ireland, this is not Pakistan, I am free to portray my faith'. And I said 'secondly because I'm Irish this is my country so I'm more free. I know I'm safe in my country'... I've had to go to some of the Imams and speak to them face to face and say 'look you are free to practice your faith in this country, no-one's going to stop you. So you have no right to tell me or our community here that we cannot practice our faith here'.

These were the only instances of sectarianism mentioned by any of the participants. In the main, relations between members of different Muslim sects in Ireland were reported to be positive. Clearly, however, the Muslim population in Ireland themselves perceive internal diversity in relation to a number of factors.

## Relationship to Islam

The relationship of a person to their religion involves a number of different facets including faith, practice and the adherence to religiously prescribed rules regarding daily living. It also includes ancestry. Ruthven points out that a person who describes

themselves as Muslim is not necessarily religiously observant as a person can be culturally Muslim without subscribing to a particular set of religious beliefs (2006: xxii). With a Muslim population in Ireland of 33,000 people there is a spectrum of stances adopted in relation to Islam. These stances span from non-practicing Muslims to devout Muslims who strive to adhere to all the rules of their religion.

The majority of those who participated in this research were devout practicing Muslims. However, this cannot be taken to mean that this is representative of the Muslim population in Ireland. Most of the participants were contacted through religious groups and religious leaders and therefore were already known to be practicing their religion. Contacting non-practicing Muslims posed difficulties for the researcher as there are no obvious channels through which to make contact with them. In this instance the non-practicing Muslims were contacted through convenience sampling.

For many Muslims, Islam is more than a religion, it is a way of life. This means that that it impacts upon all aspects of living including diet, dress, personal relationships and work. Hanif explained it by saying everything he did was shaped by religion:

Religion is everything because it's every single second of my life. It's where I belong, it's what I do. It's in my thoughts, in my talking to people, in mixing with people, eating, going to work, going to study, going shopping, whatever I want to do, it's part of that. I'm eating, I'm sleeping, I'm at home, it's every second of my life, it's everything in my life.

As well as practicing their religion and following all the rules of their religion, some Muslims in Ireland actively work to encourage lapsed Muslims back to their religion. A

number are also involved in teaching children Arabic and teaching the Quran to children. Nazeer, for example, is a member of Tablighi Jamaat and works actively to promote Islam in Ireland and to bring back non-practicing Muslims to the religion.

There are also Muslims who do not practice or follow any rules of their religion. Although no participants in this research were completely non-practicing, Aiman, in his early twenties, explained that he only occasionally attends the mosque and that he does drink alcohol and take drugs, both of which are strictly prohibited in Islam. However, he said that he would never eat pork and that whilst he considers himself to be a Muslim, he does not practice his religion very much but he does believe in God and the message of Islam.

Between the extremes of those who strictly follow all the rules of their religion and those who do not practice at all are Muslims who practice aspects of their religion. For example, Wasim explained that whilst he does drink alcohol, he also attends the mosque regularly and said that Islam is something that is very important to him. He said he has a strong belief in Allah although he does not believe the Quran to be the literal word of God:

Say for instance in some *surah's* it will talk about heaven and it will give the image of heaven - rivers of honey, rivers of milk - I mean, not for one second would I ever believe heaven has got rivers of honey, rivers of milk

However, Wasim's wife interjected at this point during the interview saying she took whatever was in the Quran as literal:

If it says there are rivers of honey that means there are rivers of honey. I do believe that there is heaven and there is hell and whatever has been said in the Quran about heaven and hell, that's a hundred percent correct and there would be a place called hell with fire and all those miserable things in it and there will be a place called heaven where you will go depending on your deeds.

The diversity of relationships present in Ireland between Muslims and Islam is further complicated by the fact that the relationship between a person and their religion is constantly changing and evolving. Participants cited a wide range of factors that contributed to this including immigration, changing life circumstances, education, the death of a loved one, discrimination, financial issues, interactions with other Muslims, time constraints and health considerations.

Whilst some interviewees said they became more attached to their religion over time, others moved away from their religion as they got older. Aiman, for example, who grew up in Ireland said that as a child religion had been very important for him but that this changed over time:

I suppose it's much easier to be a part of the Muslim community when your friends are involved but... I went to secondary school and you meet new friends, you start hanging around different areas and I suppose that would pull you away from the mosque and going quite regularly.

Many Muslims living in Ireland are immigrants from Muslim countries. The move can result in a reaffirmation or a rejection of religious beliefs and practices. Some Muslim immigrants said the change in location, culture and social surroundings impacted

immediately on the practice of their religion. Akifah, said that the move to Ireland initially resulted in her losing touch with her religion:

I feel that when I came to Ireland, I felt some days that I was losing my routine, my routine prayers, my routine Quran, and I was thinking 'what I am doing, what is the reason behind that, why I am going back from my Allah, from my religion'.

Akifah explained that this sense of losing her religious routine caused her distress but it was followed by a conscious effort on her part to get involved in religious practice in Ireland. She began by helping another woman teach the Quran to children every evening between 6.30 and 7.30 and she explained that this gave her some sense of satisfaction. She also got involved in organising a Friday meeting of Muslim women who gather to talk about their religion and how their week has been.

A number of interviewees talked about seeing Muslims arriving in Ireland turning away from their religion. The Imam of one mosque explained that this is a concern for the Muslim community so they do try to make contact with Muslims who arrive in the city and encourage them to come to the mosque in order to prevent this happening. Akifah said that she too had witnessed new arrivals turning away from their religion or becoming 'more moderate' and 'losing their values'.

One young Muslim woman divided Muslims in Ireland into two groups – those who practiced their religion and those who didn't. She said she felt that practicing Muslims and families are avoided by other Muslims and that this is because non-practicing Muslims do not want to be corrected about their behaviour or about the way they are

bringing up their children. One male participant said the main division between Muslims in Ireland was between 'good' Muslims and Muslims who are not good and who therefore share the same category as non-Muslims both of which groups will go to hell:

Anybody who is a Muslim will know what a 'good Muslim' means. Muslims don't drink, Muslims don't sleep with any girl without marriage, Muslims don't gamble, they don't smoke hash, they don't miss their prayers, they don't miss their fastings. The good Muslims are helping other Muslims, they will not sleep with their belly filled while their other Muslim brother is hungry.

A number of participants felt a strengthening of religious belief and faith after arriving in Ireland. This resulted from a range of factors. For some it was a reaction to Irish society and a reassertion of their religious identity in the face of a new environment whilst for others it was simply a case of changing circumstances that afforded them the opportunity to learn more about their religion.

Muhib explained that coming to Ireland resulted in a strengthening of his religion because as an unemployed refugee he had the time and resources to learn about Islam. He said that in Nigeria he had lots of parties and places to go to and that these were distractions that are not present in his life in Ireland and that he uses his free time to learn about his religion and to practice it better even though he explains that it is sometimes difficult to get to a mosque as he has to travel miles to get to one. He said that he has increased his knowledge of Islam since arriving in Ireland:

Back home I hadn't the time to access the original sources, you don't have access to certain books unless you are a student of knowledge or you are a scholar of the religion. However coming to this place you can actually just walk to the mosque and find the books in the library... I can access them free of charge so I've taken benefit of these opportunities.



Others said that their religion had become stronger for them as a result of negative experiences in Ireland. Nazeer said that coming to Ireland positively affected his relationship with his religion primarily because of the negative experiences he has had since coming here:

Ireland is blessed for me. I was not that much religious before. I came here and now I have a beard. I started following my religion properly only for the reason that I have been suffering.

Kamran said that living in a non-Islamic country you feel like you are representing your religion everywhere you go and making sure you are giving the right image of Islam and this means he is more attentive to his religion than in his own country and more practical.

Another more dramatic influence on the relationship between a person and religion is conversion. Four converts to Islam were interviewed about their lived experiences in Ireland. Table 5.2 outlines the backgrounds of these converts.

NAME	Country of Origin	Gender	Age	Age when converted	Religious background	Marital status
Imran	Ireland	M	40s	20s	Catholic	Married to a woman from Pakistan (arranged marriage)
Hanif	Congo	M	20s	Teens	Christian	Single
Rafidah	Ireland	F	40s	20s	Catholic	Married to a man from Libya
Mahnoor	UK	F	60s	20s	Christian	Married to a man from Pakistan

TABLE 5.2: Background of converts

All four converts had actively practiced Christianity before converting to Islam and all had converted to Islam when they were in their late teens or early twenties. Two became interested in Islam after hearing negative information about it. Three converted for

religious reasons whilst one woman converted to Islam because both she and her husband did not want their children brought up to be half of one religion and half of another.

There is no exact figure for the number of converts living in Ireland. However, a spokesperson for the Islamic Cultural Centre in Dublin said they knew of 350 converts living in Ireland. Many of these converts are Irish and have changed their name to an Islamic name. Rafidah explained that she feels the experience as a convert is different from someone who was born into the religion:

I studied my faith with British and Irish Muslims in [an Islamic country]. Not with Arab Muslims. I said that because to be able to relate to those who had converted rather than born of the faith it's fundamentally different because there's no cultural baggage or attributes to what they are practicing... I think all people who convert are very much in line with what is the true teaching and it's pure.

The conversion process for all four converts involved a number of factors that pushed them away from their own religion and pull factors that attracted them to Islam. The push factors included disillusionment with aspects of contemporary Western living, a questioning of Christian or Catholic beliefs and a linking of Christianity to colonisation. The pull factors included a fascination with Islam arising from negative stories directed at the religion and an explanation of God that was more acceptable for them. Rafidah, for example, said one of the beliefs that attracted her was the concept of the unity of God because within Catholicism she had found it difficult to separate God from the Trinity. For Mahnoor, the pull factor was the belief that conversion to the same religion as her husband would make life easier for their children.

## Reasons for immigration

The vast majority of Muslims living in Ireland are immigrants. In April 2006, of the almost 33,000 Muslims recorded as living in this country just 30.7% had Irish nationality. Almost 70% were immigrants and over 55% were either Asian or African nationals (Census 2006). This high percentage of immigrants is reflected in the research participants, most of whom were immigrants and some of whose parents were immigrants.

Interviewees put forward a range of reasons for the choice of Ireland as a place to live. The most common reason given was for education. Other reasons were employment and family reunions. Interviewees said that they had seen a growth in recent years in the number of Muslim refugees arriving in Ireland. The Imam at the Nigerian Islamic Centre in Dublin, for example, said that most of the congregation, which numbers up to three hundred on a Sunday, are refugees.

A number of interviewees who came to Ireland as asylum seekers explained that they chose Ireland as a destination because either friends or members of their family were already living here. Other people came here for business or family reasons. Kamran whose family are originally from Pakistan but who grew up in the Netherlands said he came to Ireland in order to live together with his Pakistani wife as he found it very difficult to get a visa for his wife for the Netherlands. Wasim whose family are from Pakistan said his father moved to Ireland in the 1970s for business reasons and many people in the town where he lives came from Pakistan to work in his father's business:

They would then bring other family members and their extended family members across from their countries for a better life here - to get jobs and earn better money and have the opportunity to get European passports and all of that.

Whilst for many people the move to Ireland was something planned, for others they arrived here on a holiday and stayed. Wahab from Pakistan had been living in the UK for a number of years when came to Ireland for a holiday in the 1970s. He said he found Ireland such a beautiful country he decided not to go back.

## First impressions

Muslim immigrants arriving in Ireland for the first time have a range of reactions to their new environment as they are faced with an onslaught of sights, sounds and social behaviour that is often at odds with that of their country of origin, particularly when they are from Muslim countries where social and cultural behaviour is informed by Islamic practices and regulations. Whilst immigrants who have had previous experience or extensive knowledge of the West can find the transition relatively smooth, those who have never travelled and have little knowledge of the West can find the move to Ireland causes them shock and upheaval. Akifah said that she found even the journey to Ireland difficult:

When I was in Heathrow I was thinking ‘oh my God where am I?’ People were hugging and kissing – boys and girls. I thought I was in hell. I was thinking ‘where should I look?’ - when I bore my eyes down I saw mini-skirts and legs coming. Really that was a very different experience for me.

Along with the cultural differences, immigrants are also faced with geographical and architectural differences as well as changes in climate, social life and religion. Most of these aspects informed the first impressions in a positive way as one man explained:

My first impression was this – ‘beautiful, beautiful, beautiful and beautiful’ because I had come from Lancashire where it was all smoke and factories. When I came off the boat I drove to Galway. When I passed Leixlip I was enjoying every single minute thinking ‘my goodness, the fresh air, the natural beauty’.

Most of those interviewed said they were happy living in Ireland and minimised the difficulties they experienced in their day to day lives. Most had lots of friends, enjoyed the scenery, described Irish people as nice, friendly and generous and felt lucky and thankful to be here. A number of participants also said they found many similarities between the Irish and people from their countries of origin which made the transition to Ireland easier. These similarities included the importance placed on the family, the focus on non-materialistic values and the importance of religion. Khurram said he felt the only difference between Syrians and Irish people was that Irish people had more opportunities, learned more, read more and dressed differently. However, he stressed that the political climate is very different:

Apart from the rain everything is perfect really. I feel safe, I don’t fear anybody - even the government. I don’t fear the law because I’m not breaking the law. I don’t fear anybody and it is peaceful. That is what I like. During one of my interviews they asked me ‘if you go back to Syria and you want to live there what would you take with you?’ I said ‘freedom and opportunity’. These two things are very precious things.

However, there was also criticism directed at Irish people’s way of life and Irish society including a perception that children had too much freedom and criticism of some

legislation including the fact that one is not allowed hit someone who breaks into your home. One woman in her early twenties said she felt that she lost her innocence when she arrived in Ireland as she became aware of sexuality for the first time in her life and felt that this had affected her negatively. A number of participants said they felt that children in Ireland grow up too fast.

## Militancy

According to the Islamic scholar Roggero (2002: 134), 'militancy' refers to a fusion of religion, society and politics and groups categorised as militant are sometimes referred to as 'fundamentalist' or 'neofundamentalist' and have revolutionary elements. In this research the term 'militancy' is used to refer to attitudes or behaviour that can be perceived as being military or violent in nature and that are informed or justified by a mixture of political and/or religious ideology.

Muslims living in Ireland have a diversity of views on militancy including suicide bombings. Many Muslims explained that acts of violence carried out by Muslims are political rather than religious acts and are therefore justifiable acts of defence. Others felt that it was never acceptable for any Muslim to carry out a suicide bombing as it was against their religion.

Participants who defended some instances of suicide bombing as acts of defence were nonetheless critical of Muslims who carried out suicide bombings in Western countries. However, one participant recalled an incident where he met with an Imam in Ireland who

supported Al Qaeda and said they were the product of America who created them by funding Muslim resistance against Russia in Afghanistan and then turning against Osama bin Laden and portraying him as a bad guy. A number of other interviewees said they were aware of the existence of militant views within a minority of the Muslim population of Ireland. However, most were only aware of this through word of mouth or through the media and only two participants had personal experience of hearing someone expressing militant or extremist views in public.

The leader of the Ahmadiyya community in Ireland felt that militant views existed amongst a minority of Muslims in Ireland and that militant groups have tried to gain influence amongst young Muslims in Ireland. However, he pointed out that there are only a small minority who adopt a militant view:

I've seen the leaflets. I've seen the people there. I've seen all those attitudes. But I have to say 90 percent even 98 percent of the Muslims are actually decent Muslims, they don't want anything to do with this at all. But there is that element which is trying to attract these young people - like the Al Mahajiroun movement, the Khilafat movement - they're all trying to come here.

Another participant said that whilst he was confident that there are no militant organisations in operation in Ireland, he was aware that a number of these organisations had been in Ireland on short visits. He expressed his frustration that these groups are sometimes invited to Ireland, something which he said encourages their growth:

I'm always very disappointed when we have groups like Al Mahajiroun coming over here and debating in our local universities and being invited to RTE. We know these are extremist groups from the UK. They come over here and I think they should be banned from here. By inviting them over here and

giving them oxygen, naturally they will mix with local people. My point is if we know these outfits that praise what happened on 9/11 and so on, why do we give them oxygen? Why do we let them breathe? Why do we give them voice?

Diversity within the Muslim population in Ireland relates to a number of different factors ranging from levels of religious belief and nationality to perceptions of life in Ireland and attitudes towards militancy. The perceived unity of Islam operates in opposition to this diversity but both co-exist under the umbrella of Islam and membership of the worldwide Islamic community. Diversity however, also exists in relation to perceptions of integration, levels of integration, social interactions and concerns about isolation.

## Perceptions about integration

What is meant by the term 'integration' and is it a process that has positive or negative connotations for an immigrant minority? For some participants integration was a slippery term that they felt was often misunderstood and interpreted in diverse ways. Most interviewees felt integration was a positive process that involved a symbiotic relationship between the immigrant and host community involving giving and taking as well as a reciprocal understanding and appreciation of the others' cultures and values.

Many felt that the process of integration was sometimes perceived wrongly as a process which involved abandoning ones cultures and values and replacing them with those of the host society. Imran pointed out that most Muslims are in favour of integration in the form of mutual co-operation and understanding:



Muslims say that 'yes we agree that we should integrate and we should adapt but if you're asking us to adapt drinking, but if you're asking us to adapt living immoral lives, if you're asking us to adapt telling lies, then these things we will not accept because we are religious community, we are a community of believing people, but if you're asking us that we should be more open, try to understand others, yes, this should be done'.

Muhib too felt there was widespread misunderstanding of the term 'integration' and illustrated what he meant by this by referring to a talk show which he had recently heard on Irish radio. He explained that during the show someone called in to complain about a newly published handbook about how to treat Muslim patients in Irish hospitals. Many listeners responded to the item by condemning the handbook and the hospital authorities for compiling it. The callers said Muslims should integrate. Muhib explained that he did not agree with this concept of integration:

I have worked amongst a huge expatriate community in Nigeria. We didn't place a demand on them to integrate into the Nigerian culture, to eat our food or to dress the way we dress. No, we allowed them to carry on their lives as normal for them - as long as it doesn't constitute a threat to other people - but a lot of pressure is being put on the Muslims in this country and in other European countries to integrate and the definition to give to integration is we have to eat pork and we have to go to the pub... I shouldn't be forced to go to the pub or to dress their way, or my wife shouldn't stop wearing the *hijab* but that is the only way they feel that she has integrated.

Muhib felt that Irish people's views about what constitutes integration means that Irish people misinterpret Muslims if they do not go to the pub and see this as an unwillingness to integrate. He said non-Muslims should understand that he does not want to go to the pub rather than interpreting this as a refusal to integrate.

Others understood integration as a more active process that went beyond simply accepting difference and involved conscious attempts to get to know others and to exchange information in a two way process. This is what Rafidah, an Irish convert, understood by the term:

Integration means getting active, out there in your schools with your children, being more active, going to those meetings and explaining. It involves interaction, volunteering, attending courses... you have to get out there and start mixing in, look for employment, continue your studies, interact with your neighbours, that's vitally important.

All interviewees who spoke about integration viewed it as an important aspect of Muslim life in Ireland. Some said it helped Irish people understand Islam whilst others felt that on a practical level it opened doors for them in terms of business dealings and opportunities and contributed to a greater sense of belonging in Ireland. Khurram from Syria who had lived in Ireland for over twenty years said that he felt integration provided positive benefits to both the immigrants and the wider Irish society:

If you isolate everyone, no-one helps each other. It's like I have two hands - left and right - both of them helping each other. If both of them are right hands they won't work, if two of them are left hands they won't work, if I have one right and one left, they help each other. That is what I would like to see.

A number of interviewees felt that in order for integration to take place in Ireland on any level that there were a few necessary prerequisites for Muslims. These involved firstly learning the language of the country and secondly, expressing views openly rather than hiding away and becoming isolated. Many expressed the view that an inability to speak English was a major factor that prohibited integration.

## Levels of integration

Muslims in Ireland had different perceptions of how integrated they were individually and as a community. A number of interviewees expressed concerns that integration was not taking place. Others felt that some sections of the Muslim population were integrating whilst others remained isolated and on the fringes of Irish society. Notably, the participants who had spent the longest time in Ireland had more non-Muslim Irish friends than newcomers and were also more likely to be involved in groups and organisations beyond the Muslim community.

Wasim said he feels that some of the Muslims living in his town have integrated very well but that this is not uniform for all the Muslims in the town. He said that older more established families, particularly the Arab communities, have integrated very well and have managed to mix their own cultural values whilst at the same time adopting cultural values from Ireland. However, he said he feels that Pakistani families in particular have a tendency to stick to themselves. He felt this is partly because many of them come from very rural parts of Pakistan and are not used to interacting beyond their small communities and therefore they are not so open to integrating with Irish society as they feel insecure about living in Ireland and they feel lost in their new surroundings. They therefore end up becoming isolated and mix only amongst themselves.

Wasim also felt that men were more likely to integrate than women. This feeling was echoed by a number of interviewees who felt that because many immigrant women were stay-at-home mothers they were less likely to integrate because of their circumstances.

Rafidah who is involved in a group that works with Muslim women in Ireland said she felt that integration is sometimes more difficult for women. She said she felt this was particularly the case for immigrant Muslim women from countries where there was an oppressive political regime in power as these women arrive in Ireland fearing the government and the police and they feel they are different and do not know how they are going to be accepted. This is coupled with the fact that the men go out and work whilst often the women stay at home.

Others did feel that there was large scale integration and spoke about their personal experiences of integration in Ireland. Perhaps one indication of this was in the names chosen for children by a Syrian woman who arrived in Ireland in the 1980s. Her first three children had traditional Islamic names. However, her youngest child was named Conor. All children had been born in Ireland and were on the local sports teams and played gaelic games.

Another interviewee who described himself as well integrated was Wahab who said he and his wife had put a lot of effort into integrating their children as they felt it was of key importance to their life in Ireland. He said that he himself knows his neighbours very

well, that they exchange visits between homes and that they are all Irish and this for him is what is meant by integration.

## Social interactions

According to many of the participants, the primary social network for practicing Muslims living in Ireland is made up of other Muslims. This is for a variety of reasons including what are perceived to be a number of barriers to socialising with non-Muslim Irish people and because of a feeling of shared religious and cultural backgrounds with fellow Muslims. The primacy of the social network with other Muslims is despite the existence of a perceptible diversity within the Muslim population of Ireland which is transcended by a sense of unity and a network of interactions that cross divisional, social and national boundaries. This supports the findings by McPhee (2005: 53) that Muslims spend the majority of their free time with 'like-minded people and in particular with Muslims who attend the same mosque as they do'.

Practicing Muslims discussed the importance of their friendships with other Muslims and, for some, these friendships were the most important social interactions in their lives.

Muhib from Nigeria explained that his highest category of friendship was with a fellow Muslim. He said he did have many Irish friends but explained that these were in a different category of friendship to his Muslim and African friends with whom he shared a lot of common denominators and common challenges. Muhib said that fellow Muslims were more important to him than his own closest blood relatives, if non-Muslim. He said that if he had a brother who had converted to Christianity, he would put an Irish convert

to Islam ahead of this blood brother. He also categorised his African friends into Muslim and Christian:

With my Christian friends the relationship, however deep, is a relationship that ends in this world. I die, or he dies, that is the end of it. But with my Muslim friends it is a relationship that exists beyond this world because they are not just my friends, they are also my brothers in faith. My non-Muslim friends are my brothers and sisters in humanity.

A member of the Ahmadiyya community said that their social life is small as they tend to socialise amongst themselves. He said that whilst they had a lot of interactions with their neighbours on the street, their interaction beyond this was limited:

If you go outside this circle there is a problem. If you go out to the individual members of the community they tend to stay with each other rather than mixing with other Irish people and this is purely down to cultural differences, food differences, social differences also.

Whilst most of the participants said that most of their interactions were with fellow Muslims, there were also a small number of participants whose main social interactions were with non-Muslims. Two of these described themselves as non-practicing Muslims whilst another said he was a practicing Muslim but did not take the Quran literally.

Not all participants viewed the Muslim social network in positive terms. One man spoke about his negative attitude towards other Muslims. He had grown up in a town in the west of Ireland in the 1970s and his family were the only non-Irish family in the town at that time. As a young child all of his friends were Irish and non-Muslim. However, when he was around ten about eight Muslim families from Pakistan moved into the area and he

said that this resulted in a complete change in atmosphere in the town and changed his family's social life which shifted to include mainly Muslim people:

I felt anger towards these women who came here. Even now. Oh I used to despise them, quite literally, and I would be ashamed and I actually grew up with a feeling of shame. I'm being very honest here. It's not a great thing you know. I don't feel ashamed anymore but yeah, that's how I felt towards them, ashamed to be associated.

Many interviewees also explained that they often converge in groups and communities of shared nationalities and cultural backgrounds and that their main social network was with Muslims from the same country of origin. Some participants explained that this was a way of remembering the country they had left. For others, it was a natural evolution resulting from social networks that had transported semi-intact from the country of origin. Afsheen, for example, explained that she mainly socialised with Syrians and they had an informal group who met a few times a month. She said that the different nationalities living in the town all have their own groups who meet separately. Afsheen said she is involved in helping Muslim families in the town but that mostly she helps Syrians - with things like applying for stamps, child benefit, housing or social welfare. Wahab from Pakistan said that whilst he helps a lot of people in business matters, 90 percent of the people he helps are Pakistani. Practicing Muslims, regardless of their length in time in Ireland often said that their main social focus was with Muslims who shared their cultural and social backgrounds.

The diverse mix of nationalities amongst the Muslim community in Ireland coupled with the relative smallness of the Muslim population means that differences between cultures

and backgrounds are often transcended as different communities and cultures use shared resources, particularly for religious purposes. However, the fact that Muslims worship together does not necessarily mean that they socialise together. Wasim, for example, said that beyond the boundaries of the mosque there is a very clear division between Muslims from different countries:

On Fridays it's great, you say hello to everybody and there's all different languages and different ethnic groups. But there's one thing for sure. This is in the prayer time. But when people go home the Arabs stick with the Arabs, the Pakistanis stick with the Pakistanis and the Punjabis stick with the Punjabis and the Afghanis stick with the Afghanis and the Africans sticks with the Africans. Oh of course they all greet each other but are they actually friends? I've never seen it.

There are both unifying and divisive factors within the Muslim population of Ireland and although their faith is a shared commonality there are often more differences than similarities within the population. This diversity can create challenges amongst the Muslim population. One of the challenges mentioned by participants in relation to interaction amongst the Muslim community is language barriers. Another challenge was racism.

Even in the early Muslim communities, society was divided into social classes with Arab Muslims as the elite (Esposito, 2005: 39). This hierarchical division has in some instances persisted amongst Muslim communities. One interviewee from Nigeria said that he had experienced incidents of racism from within the Muslim community. Previous research by McPhee (2005: 52) also uncovered views that racism exists within the Muslim population of Ireland. The diverse attitudes that exist within the Muslim



population of Ireland towards militancy can also cause challenges. One elderly man, expressed concerns about the existence of militant attitudes within the Muslim population in Ireland. He said he tries to tackle these attitudes by keeping his pulse on the Pakistani community across Ireland and tackling people who express militant views and saying they are not wanted in Ireland. He explained that the reason he is concerned by extremist attitudes is because they will make things difficult for his grandchildren when they grow up in Ireland as Muslims and will be linked with terrorism and extremism.

## Interactions with non-Muslims

Social integration refers to interactions, friendships and involvement with the wider Irish society. Participants had diverse levels of interaction in this regard. Whilst most interviewees spent most of their time with other Muslims, all had some level of interaction with Irish non-Muslims. This ranged from acquaintances and friendships through work or neighbours, involvement in community groups and organisations and interaction through children's friends.

Only one participant said he had no Irish friends. Hanif had been in Ireland for five years. He arrived as an asylum seeker, was granted refugee status and was a student at a third level institution where he said he had many friends. However, he explained that the majority of his friends were Muslim and most were from Asia and Africa although he said he also had friends from some European countries. He said that whilst he did not have any Irish friends he did say he had many Irish acquaintances.

Another participant, Wasim, who grew up in a small town in the West of Ireland but whose family were originally from Pakistan said that he had lots of Irish friends when he was growing up. However, he said he knew many Muslim families who were completely isolated from Irish society and did not interact with Irish people at all:

You have kids that are born here that leave school and come home and their first language is Urdu or Punjabi. Their mothers have been here for 25 years and they still don't speak English. Their fathers still don't speak English. They still go home and they do exactly what they would do as if they were in Pakistan or if they were wherever they come from.

Alina who had been living in Ireland for just one year said she had spoken to some Muslim children from Pakistan who live in the same town. She said they told her that most of their friends are Pakistanis and that they do not interact with the Irish children because there are so many confusions about language, culture, clothes, religious observance. The children told her that they avoid their Irish classmates and mix with their own community and Muslim children. She explained that she tried to encourage them to be friends with Irish children but they seemed to be afraid of being friends with Irish although she did not understand why. She said that when she talks to most of the Muslim children in the community and asks them 'who are their friends?', that they say 'all the Muslims' or their cousins and Pakistanis, not Irish children. Another man from the same town said that if you go to the local school you see all the Pakistani boys in little groups, the Muslim girls together in little groups and the African girls in little groups together.

One other interviewee talked about the fact that she does not have many Irish friends. Akifah from Pakistan had only been living in Ireland for two years. She explained that although she does know some Irish people through college and also knows some Irish people through her relations who have Irish non-Muslim friends that most of her interactions are with other Muslims.

All of the participants who had been living in Ireland for over twenty years had many interactions with Irish non-Muslims both through friendships and through work. This could indicate that the longer one stays in a country, the more likely one is to integrate but it is not a clear correlation because it is also important to note that the Muslim population in Ireland was very small up until the 1990s so perhaps their high levels of interaction with the wider Irish society was out of necessity and because the number of people from their same country or background was so limited. Khurram from Syria for example was living in Ireland for over twenty years. He said he had many Irish friends who he visited in their homes and with whom he often had social occasions. However, he said he sometimes sees newcomers arriving in Ireland who are afraid to integrate. He said he hates when he sees new arrivals isolating themselves from the local community and spoke about a friend who recently brought his family to Ireland and whose teenage daughter did not want to attend school because she was shy. He spoke to his friend:

I said 'push her to be inside the society, she has to learn, she has to live here, she has to interact, your wife she has to learn English also. You have to live here. You can't isolate yourself from this society'. I don't want them to lose their identity - their identity should be preserved but they should be dealing with the people in Ireland - buying, selling, moving, interacting, enjoying it, and helping each other. There is no trouble at all, it shouldn't be any problem.

Some Muslims are fearful, some Muslim aren't fearful but I encourage every Muslim to interact and to not be afraid of any Irish person.

The two participants who described themselves as non-practicing Muslims appeared to have the most interactions and friendships with Irish non-Muslims. However, the vast majority of interviewees did have lots of interactions and some friendships with Irish people. Even Nazeer who experienced many instances of discrimination, including verbal abuse and damage to his property, said he has made many friends in Ireland, particularly through his work.

The level of interaction between individual Muslims and the wider Irish society changes over time. For example, Wasim who grew up in a small town in the West of Ireland said that when his family arrived in the town in the 1970s they were the only non-whites in the area. He said it was a lovely atmosphere to grow up in and said they were never made to feel that they were any different. During the interview he showed me photographs of family birthday parties where the house was full of Irish non-Muslim children and of swimming pools and other play areas where he and his sister are the only non-white children. He describes it as 'a great atmosphere' and said 'the townsfolk really absorbed my family'. However, he said that when other Pakistani Muslims came to the town things changed dramatically:

Around about the age of ten the guys that were working here started bringing their families over and there was a complete change in atmosphere. Before this, the mothers of the Irish kids would be having tea with my mother and it was just walk in walk out type situation and everybody's door was open. But as soon as these women came with their children - we just saw these people materialise out of nowhere - but anyway, what resulted from that was a closing of doors. People started coming around less, simply

because they felt they weren't welcome... The environment changed but it was a very slow process but it happened and within a year you could actually feel marked differences, you could actually see some of the guys going to school, guys like Mohammad, they would not speak to any of the other kids.

Muslims also have interactions with the wider Irish society through involvement in local community groups and organisations. Interviewees who were involved in such groups felt it was a very enriching aspect of their lives. Afsheen said she made many friends through her involvement in local committees and associations. She said that when she came to Ireland first, twenty years previously she was busy because she had four young children but when they started school she was bored being in the house all day so she decided to get involved. She first joined the parents association in the school:

Actually when I got involved I was very worried, very nervous because it was new for me but everybody made me feel welcome. If I don't understand anything they explain to me and I have to say I did learn a lot and then people started to learn about me so they asked me to be involved with the family resource centre so I get involved and I did a course and then this year I'm getting involved with the national forum and I'm so happy and I have to say I have learned a lot and my English has improved a lot.

There are also those who have interactions with Irish society for religious reasons. One member of the Ahmadiyya community said he preaches in towns and villages around Ireland and through this he interacts regularly with the wider Irish society. He explains that his plan is to preach on streets, in schools in libraries and to give people an opportunity to ask questions about Islam and thereby to remove misconceptions about Islam.

As well as Muslims actively going out into towns and public places to inform Irish people about Islam, interviewees also talked about the fact that Irish people sometimes come to them seeking information. Wasim said he is constantly surprised at the numbers of Irish people who are actively looking for information about Islam. He himself has been contacted numerous times by primary schools wanting more information about Islam and he also felt that Irish people reached out to give generously to the Irish Muslim community when they were in need. He felt that Irish generosity in the wake of the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005 is an indication of Irish feeling towards Muslims and said his local community donated €28,000 to relief efforts which he felt was an indication of 'how much love the Irish community has for Muslims'.

## Other religions and sports

Interactions take place between Muslims and Christians on a daily basis but often the religion of the other is unknown because there are often no identifiable traits or dress associated with particular religions. Muhib explained that he found it difficult to distinguish between Muslims and Christians in Ireland compared to Nigeria where this identification was possible based on dress, conversation and response to public religious events such as the call to prayer for Muslims:

Even if there is a man and he has a beard which is usually identified as a distinctive feature of the Muslim, in the West it's not - because you might find Hindu people having beards, you might find Jewish people having beards and you might have even secular people having beards - so it is difficult for you to pick out someone in a crowd and say he's a Muslim.

The two participants who spoke most about their experiences with Christianity both lived in a small town in the West of Ireland and both had lived in Ireland for over twenty years. Afsheen introduced the researcher to the local parish priest who knew her on a first name basis. She also brought the researcher to Knock and showed her around the Catholic site where thirteen people are said to have seen the Virgin Mary in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She said that she had previously visited Knock with her Irish friend Margaret and she really enjoyed it. Afsheen also helps out in the local church when there are first communions or confirmations taking place and shows people to their seats.

Wasim, who grew up in Ireland and went to Catholic schools said the only thing he did not do at the school was eat pork. He said he learnt the catechism and did his first holy communion and his confirmation. He explained that whilst he did not actually eat the communion, he did put it in his mouth and he remembers the prayers for the first confession:

Bless me father for I have sinned this is my first confession. And then I did my confirmation. You know I think it was a purple velvet suit... I just followed the guys you know.

Other interviewees who had less involvement with Christianity also talked about their positive experiences when they did have interactions with Christians in relation to religion. Khurram said he regularly goes to Christian celebrations and funerals and has a lot of interaction with Christians:

Of course they know I don't drink and they respect me. During Ramadan sometimes they tease me with the food [laughing] in a funny way - they know

I'm fasting and they love it... I mean those are the things we try to enjoy. I respect them and they respect me in a very mutual way.

Another participant spoke about his first ever visit to a church. He explained that he was attending an anti-war rally in a rural setting and a number of people from his Muslim community were invited to attend. It was around 2003. Before he went to the event, the organiser asked would it be okay if they went into a church if it rained. Aahil said he wouldn't mind. At the rally he met the local priest and bishop and when it rained they went inside the church and even prayed in it. There were around fifteen Muslims there in total. The local priest gave him a bible as a gift and he gave the priest a Quran as a gift and he addressed the crowd inside the church and led the Muslim prayers after the Catholics there had prayed:

It was my first time to go inside a church. Before this I only knew the church from the cinema or the TV but not in reality... I remember our people who attended, all of them they were very very happy and they believed that it was very good experience and a very good feeling for both.

One interviewee said he was very involved in improving relations between Islam and other religions in Ireland as he wanted to remove misunderstandings between the different religions. However, he pointed out that many Muslims would not attempt communication or understanding with some religions, especially Judaism. He said he had also organised a religious founders day and invited Hindu, Jewish, Christian and Muslim speakers to talk at it. He is also involved in an interfaith movement and said he meets regularly with the leaders of different faiths. He said he is also trying to bring together the different sects within Islam.



The majority of Muslim interviewees had positive experiences of Christianity and of Christians. However, one participant said he believed all Christians would go to hell and therefore it was his duty to inform everyone in Ireland about Islam:

The Quran said only the Muslims will go to heaven - only the good Muslims - not all Muslims. Heaven is a purified place. Adam and Eve did a small sin and they were kicked out, so the heaven is not for sinful people whether he is Muslim or he is non-Muslim. Muslims will be sent into the hell to wash their sins and then they will be brought back to heaven. But the non-Muslims, they will live there for ever and that life will never finish.

Many of those interviewed took part in sports and saw this as a positive experience and an integral part of integration. Afsheen who has four children talked about how they are involved in playing gaelic games and soccer and are on their local teams whilst Aahil said that some of his best memories in Ireland come from his involvement in soccer clubs in Dublin and in the West of Ireland. He said he enjoyed the fun and interaction that playing games with Irish people entails and he still plays soccer on a weekly basis with local people from the area.

Imran said he encourages people in his community to get involved in local health clubs and sports activities. However, he pointed out that swimming on beaches is one sport that can cause challenges for Muslims, particularly women. He explains that this is because girls and women sometimes wear very little on beaches in Ireland and this can be intimidating for Muslim women who cover themselves and wear head-scarves. He explained that Muslim women in his community won't swim in front of other people and that Islamically they should not try to swim in front of men. He said that this goes for men too but that he swims himself and wears very long shorts and a t-shirt. He explained

that he swims because it is something he has done all his life and he himself thinks there is no harm in swimming.

Wahab, a successful businessman who is originally from Pakistan, also stressed the importance of sports. He said he encourages his family to get involved in local sports and said that he himself used to play hockey and that it helped him get to know people in the area. He said he strongly encourages his children and grandchildren to get involved in sports and that his grandchild plays soccer, rugby, hurling and swimming. He said that whilst he does not want his children to forget Islam, at the same time he thinks they should play sports and mix and play together to get to know each other better:

Sports are best thing to help Muslims integrate with the society. You start with children when they're young and when they have friends from four or five years of age bring them to playgrounds, let them go camping, on holidays, on summer camps, rugby camps. Parents play a positive part in this.

Not every participant was involved in sports but clearly those who were saw it as a very positive step towards understanding, integration and mutually beneficial exchange.

However, in one small town visited by the researcher there was an area outside the mosque where a group of children gathered to play. She was told that this was a regular play area for kids in the locality. However, it was notable that all of the kids were Pakistani. An interviewee in the area explained that only Muslim kids played in the space and that they did not mix with the local Irish children.

## Concerns regarding lack of integration

A number of participants felt the consequences of isolation are particularly evident amongst Muslim women who are often stay-at-home mothers and who therefore do not have as many opportunities to integrate with Irish society as those who are out in the workforce. Rafidah said she felt that failure to integrate was having negative consequences for these women, particularly in their relationships with their children:

At times it can be confrontational because the woman, not venturing to understand society around her, doesn't understand what her children are bringing home - be it information, be it practical, be it useless even. So it happened that the children started saying 'we'll share it amongst ourselves, Mam wouldn't understand it'.

Others felt that a lack of integration could lead to a breakdown of relationships beyond the family unit. Sayyid, for example, said he believed there was a danger that if Muslims became isolated from the rest of Irish society it would lead to more militant attitudes. He felt that isolation sometimes occurs because immigrants do not know the language of the wider society so they stick to people with whom they can converse and then that small group of people grows to such an extent that they do not need to interact with people beyond that group.

Wasim felt that isolation leads people to sometimes feel they are victimised when that is not the case. He said Muslim children growing up in Ireland often socialise with other Muslim children rather than mixing with Irish kids and this ends up leaving them feeling scared and disillusioned and discriminated against. He said these kids are confident when

they are playing with other children from the same background but that when they go to school they are meek and insecure. Their parents who have been in Ireland for twenty-five years 'still refuse to assimilate' and their children are suffering as a result of this because the children are Irish passport holders but are more comfortable being in Pakistan than in Ireland. The children end up living in Ireland not living to their full potential and feeling as though they are locked in:

That closed minded-ness creates a thinking where you think you are right and it's almost like a paranoia. People might just look at you because you're brown, I mean people do that right? Or people look at you because you're wearing chupples – slippers - right? But how a person would interpret that would be 'that man's looking at me because I'm black or I'm this or I'm that'.

Imran, an Irish convert, felt that if integration did not take place that it would cause problems in Ireland in the years to come. He said that a failure to integrate would result in misunderstandings and distrust and would be a breeding ground for radical groups. He also felt that when Muslims do not integrate they can often feel that they are being picked on and targeted when that is not the case. He felt that integration was the key to avoiding a situation where young Muslims would grow up into 'militant fanatics'. He also felt that a lack of integration would result in an identity crisis for Muslims in twenty years time:

An identity crisis means are we Irish? Are we Muslim? Are we this? What are we? And our role as parents is to integrate our children into Irish society. I integrate them, I make them understand who they are, what they are and then also tell them 'not only are you Muslim, but you're Irish so Irish means you must respect the laws of the land, you must learn the language of the land, if you can, Gaelic, you must also integrate'. When I use integrate I mean the traditions of Ireland. Now traditions don't mean drinking, going to nightclubs, things like that but you must be as close as you can be and be proud to be Irish as well as being a Muslim.

The importance many Muslims attach to integration is evident from their concerns about a lack of integration and their fears to what this could lead to. On a family level, participants felt that it could lead to a break-down in relationships between parents and children because bridges of communication and understanding would not be built. On a societal level participants felt it could lead to isolation and potentially create a breeding ground for distrust, misunderstandings and ultimately militant behaviours.

## Conclusion

This chapter began with a general outline of the Muslim population in Ireland in relation to both its unity and diversity. The diversity present within the population springs from a range of factors including levels of religiosity, reasons for immigration, nationality, level of education, membership of religious groups or sects and levels of social interaction both with other Muslims, with the worldwide Islamic community and with the wider Irish non-Muslim society. There was also diversity within the Muslim population relating to their views on integration, what it means and what the implications would be for a lack of integration. There was a sense that a failure to integrate would have serious ramifications for Irish society and for Muslims living in Ireland and could result in isolation and extremism. Participants felt that communication between different religious groups and involvement in sporting activities provided areas where positive exchange and a greater understanding of differences could be fostered.

## Chapter 6: Findings - Muslims and religion

All Muslims, Arab and non-Arab, rich and poor, black and white, caliph and craftsman, male and female, are bound by Islamic law as members of a single, transnational community or brotherhood of believers.

(Esposito, 2005: 88)

### Introduction

Islam is often described as a way of life rather than as a religion. From its earliest years the sacred and secular were combined in a complex system of rules that govern all aspects of life from diet and dress to social obligations and interactions with non-Muslims. This, coupled with the fact that the Islamic ideal is for Muslims to live in countries under Muslim rule, means that Muslims living in non-Muslim countries such as Ireland face particular challenges in relation to the practice of their religion and they must find ways to adapt to their non-Muslim surroundings. Gilliat-Ray (2002: 187) points out that Muslims in the West are faced with trying to achieve what is a delicate balance between asserting membership of the *ummah* and of seeking recognition of Islamic identity and needs in local settings. This chapter looks at the challenges faced by Muslims in Ireland in the practice of their religion in this country.

## Places of prayer

The mosque has been the centre of public worship in Islam since the foundation of the religion. During the early expansion of Islam, Muslims established towns near the major conquered cities and these towns were centred around the mosque which ‘served as the religious and public focal point of the towns’ (Esposito, 2005: 39). The centrality of the mosque for Muslim communities has continued through the centuries as it is used for both worship and social gatherings. Wolffe (1993: 149) points out that the mosque ‘is the basic unit of Muslim organization’. However, one of the first difficulties faced by Muslim immigrants in a new country is finding suitable premises for use as a mosque. This is the source of ongoing difficulties for Muslim communities across Ireland. The limitations imposed on Muslim communities due to the lack of religious facilities means they must often find ways to adapt to the environment, for example, by praying in existing buildings rather than purpose built mosques.

Every city and major town in Ireland now has a Muslim population, yet there are only three purpose built mosques in the country – two in Dublin and one in Ballyhaunis in County Mayo. This means that most of the mosques used by Muslims in Ireland are makeshift premises in existing buildings. In the main these are residential premises in suburban estates that are either bought or rented by the local Muslim community. A number of industrial warehouses and community halls are also used by Muslim communities for daily prayers or for Friday prayers and major celebrations.

The difficulties relating to places of prayer entail a number of different factors including renting premises, obtaining planning permission, purchasing land, problems with parking spaces, the distance from Muslims to their nearest mosques, getting time off work for prayer and finding a place in the workplace to conduct the daily prayer. A number of participants said that the lack of mosques was the main problem faced by Muslims in Ireland as this translated into a lack of space to worship and to educate their children about Arabic and the Quran as this normally takes place in the context of the mosque.

The types of places used by Muslims in Ireland for public prayer are widely varied. In Waterford for example, Friday prayers are conducted in a hospital building in the grounds of Waterford Regional Hospital. The building is normally the Resident Medical Student building. However, the hospital has granted permission for the building to be used for Friday prayer in order to cater for the growing number of Muslim doctors working in the hospital. Another residential house in the suburbs of Waterford is used for daily prayer. The majority of Muslims attending these buildings are from the Middle East, Arab countries and Asia. Also in Waterford, up until 2006 a group of Nigerian Muslims held their public prayer meetings in a small room over a shop in the centre of the city. The room doubled up as a hairdressing salon by day and a family's living quarters by night. When the researcher visited it one Sunday during prayer time there were about thirty people in the small room. Most of them were sitting on the floor against walls and piled onto the bottom section of a bunkbed. The group subsequently relocated the mosque to an industrial warehouse on the outskirts of the city in 2006 after searching for a number of years for a suitable place for prayer.



## Space

There are often immediate challenges for a Muslim community once premises for public prayer has been found and established. The first of these is limitations on space.

Sometimes this means there is no room for women to attend congregational prayer and sometimes it puts a strain on the local neighbourhood because of the lack of parking thus forcing the community to find alternative places of prayer.

Up to fifty Muslims attend the weekly Friday prayer in the Resident Medical Student building in Waterford. The building cannot cope with larger numbers. One person at the mosque explained that it is only men who attend Friday prayer as there is no room for women. One woman who lives in the area explained that when she realised there was no space for women at the mosque she got involved in setting up a weekly Friday meeting of women in her home. This is attended by around seven women every week.

In Galway a residential house in the suburbs is used as a mosque for daily prayers and as a small school for Arabic and lessons on Islam. However, the house cannot accommodate all the Muslims who wish to attend Friday prayer or the major festivals so they are held in community centres in the town. One of the centres belongs to the City Council whilst the other is a community centre. One participant at the mosque explained that up to one thousand people attend the festivals and up to seven hundred attend Friday prayers. The Friday prayers are held regularly at the same centres but the venue for festival

celebrations has to be booked well in advance and use of a centre is determined by availability on the day.

Residential houses are often used for small Muslim communities living in small towns or suburbs. However, as the number attending the mosque will often increase rapidly, this results in a lack of parking spaces. The shortage of parking spaces at the Galway mosque was one of the reasons that they had to move Friday prayers.

Another example of the impact of the lack of car parking spaces is the Clonee Islamic Centre, also known as the North Dublin Islamic Centre, located in a residential housing estate in the Western suburbs of Dublin. In 2006 the house was home to the Imam and his family and was also used as a mosque and as a classroom for learning the Quran and Arabic for around fifty children in the area five evenings a week for one hour. Problems began when the numbers attending Friday prayer swelled between 2006 and 2007 from seventy to about one hundred and thirty. The Imam explained that this resulted in parking problems and neighbours complained to the local councillor.

The mosque received a letter from the local authority, Fingal County Council, requesting that they immediately stop their activities as it was not permitted to use the house for public worship. The letter stated that if they did not stop they would be fined twenty thousand euro. The Imam said that they organised a petition which had around one hundred and fifty signatures pleading with the local council to do something for them as they had no alternative for a prayer room. The Council responded by saying they had to

stop Friday prayers at the premises but added that they would grant planning permission for another premises once all the needs and requirements were met.

From February to July 2007 the Friday prayers were relocated to the local community centre. However, numbers attending Friday prayers dropped down to about ninety and there were not sufficient washing facilities at the centre. The Imam explained that this was not an ideal arrangement:

This is temporary so we are having our prayers there and to be honest ... nobody is happy in the Muslim community because everyone wants their own place of worshipping. We want to have our own mosque, we want to have our own place, which is accessible anytime, whenever we want to worship.

These experiences can often be demoralising for the Muslim community who are forced to relocate and to find an alternative premises. However, this move can also be viewed by the community as a positive step. The Imam at the Clonee Islamic Centre said that initially it felt devastating but that he also took it as inspiration to move to a bigger space. They eventually secured another premises and the Imam explained that he felt positive about the changes because he felt that anything that happened was because there was a better future that Allah wants. The new premises was officially opened on March 21<sup>st</sup> 2009 with Minister for Finance, Brian Lenihan, as special guest of honour.

## Finding premises

Whilst the above examples highlights difficulties that Muslim communities face in existing premises, there are also challenges in trying to find premises for public prayer. The difficulties include requirements of space and parking, landlord requests for

references, the requirement of washing facilities and the financial implications of renting suitable premises.

The Imam of the Clonee Islamic Centre explained that whilst they used the local community centre as a temporary place for Friday prayers, they struggled for around four months to find new premises. When they eventually found premises which could accommodate around two hundred people they spoke to the letting agent who requested 'many references'. This all took about three months. They then had to sign a three year lease. The Imam described the rent as 'very very high, very expensive' and said it was about three and a half thousand euro per month. He said they would have to arrange funding and collections from Muslims living all over Dublin to fund the premises.

Another difficulty is the requirement for a place to wash before prayer. In the new premises rented by the Clonee Islamic Centre, the community had to install new basins and a toilet. Community Centres sometimes do not have proper washing facilities and this causes problems for Muslims using these venues.

One Imam said he experienced difficulties in his discussions with the local council as they did not have an understanding of Islam or of the need for a mosque for the growing Muslim community:

Most of the people working in the council are Irish so they're not used to being asked can we buy land to build a mosque because the first thing that comes in their head is 'hang on this is a Roman Catholic country'. And so you actually feel a little bit of prejudice... I mean the person I spoke to, he was genuinely shocked... they just didn't know what to do with me.

Another problem that Muslim communities face is the reluctance of landlords to rent out premises for religious reasons. In Waterford, a group of Nigerian Muslims rent out a large warehouse in an industrial estate which they use for public prayer on Fridays and Sundays. They explained that securing this premises took over two and a half years. One man explained that when they responded to adverts trying to rent new premises and explained it was for religious purposes they were immediately told that it had been taken.

People will often converge with people of the same nationality as they share an important element of their identity. This manifests itself in the Muslim population in different ways, most noticeably when members of one nationality worship together. In Waterford this was particularly evident as there were two mosques in the city, one of which was based in Waterford Regional Hospital and which was attended by people of all nationalities and, one of which was based in an industrial estate on the outskirts of the city and was particularly for Nigerian Muslims living in the South East region. It is important to note however that at no stage did any of the people attending either of these mosques say that another nationality was not welcome to attend, again emblematic of the underlying sense of unity felt by Muslims in Ireland.

## Distance

There is a perception amongst the Muslims who participated in this research that there is a shortage of mosques in Ireland. This shortage often results in Muslims having to travel relatively long distances in order to attend congregational prayer. Distance is a

prohibitive factor regarding public prayer. Muhib explained that, although he does attend a mosque in a nearby suburb every Friday, it is impossible for him to go to the mosque everyday because it is so far away.

The number of mosques in Ireland is growing in line with the increasing Muslim population. For many, this means that the difficulties relating to distance are more easily overcome than twenty years ago. Samir who grew up in Ireland said things have changed since the 1980s when he lived in a town where there was no mosque so they travelled to Dublin on Sundays to the mosque. When he was in school he never went to the mosque on Fridays except during the summer holidays because he was in school but now living in Dublin he can attend the mosque every Friday.

Islamic leaders come up with ways to overcome the difficulty of distance. For example, the leader of the Ahmadiyya community explained that they deal with the problem of distance by encouraging families to set up their own prayer centres or meetings in homes to pray in congregation. He said that this is the norm amongst Muslim communities. He also explained that they organise regular social occasions that people living further away can attend:

Every month for example in the West of Ireland we would call all the Ahmadiyyas once a month to Galway and we would hold a full day's event of lectures, talks, speeches, children's classes, and enjoyment as well, socialising, that's what we do.

The Imams of mosques located in residential buildings and warehouses all expressed their hope that they would soon acquire land to build a mosque. In some cases, a suitable

site had been already obtained and they were in the process of trying to obtain planning permission.

## Mosques and language

The diversity of nationalities present within the Muslim population of Ireland can result in linguistic complications during worship. Wolffe (1993: 153) points out that the ethnic diversity of the British Muslim population has caused considerable problems for Imams. A similar challenge has arisen within mosques in Ireland.

The fact that Muslims living in Ireland come from so many different nationalities means that communication can be difficult as so many languages are represented. Many Muslims interviewed explained that English is the language they use to communicate with each other. English is also often used within the context of the mosque particularly when the mosque is frequented by Muslims of many different nationalities. For example, one participant who attends the mosque in Waterford explained that the prayers are said in Arabic but that because of the diversity of nationalities present the Friday sermon is delivered in English. Sermons in many other mosques are also often delivered in English.

The different nationalities of Muslims in Ireland often worship together but a number of participants did link certain mosques around Ireland with certain nationalities. One interviewee described one mosque as Kuwaiti, however, another person said the same mosque was mainly Arab but other people worshipped there too. The Imam of one mosque in a Dublin suburb explained that most of the Muslims attending the mosque

were from Pakistan but there were also Arab, Nigerian and Indian Muslims attending. He said that whilst he believed that cultural factors from each country does influence the interpretation of Islam and Islamic law that it does not affect the practice of prayer or worship which remains the same.

In both Waterford and Dublin there are mosques specifically designed to cater for the Nigerian Muslim populations. However, not all Nigerian Muslims living in these cities attend these mosques. Muhib from Nigeria explained that he does not attend the Nigerian mosque in Dublin because there are doctrinal differences so he attends another mosque for Friday prayer. However, he said that on Sundays he and his family do meet with other African Muslims to worship together:

Back home you have different mosques aligning themselves to different doctrinal schools. So that might explain the reason why I don't go to the Nigerian mosque for Muslims. The Imam there is my friend and outside the mosque we meet and we socialise and do a lot of things together but when it comes to practising the faith we have certain differences.

Muhib says that the majority of Nigerians in Dublin attend the Nigerian mosque. However, he explained that it is not just because of their nationality, it is also because the lectures are given in indigenous Nigerian language so this makes it easier for people to understand what is being said.

Differences between Muslims of different nationalities in Ireland are often transcended within the confines of the mosque. Mosques in other Western European countries are often more clearly affiliated with certain sects or countries. However, the relative unity of



the Irish Muslim population in the context of worshipping can possibly be attributed to the size of the population and its relatively recent growth. Although a number of participants identified certain mosques as being linked with specific nationalities, this division is not clear cut or explicitly specified in the mosques and the use of English and Arabic within the mosques is used as a unifying factor.

## Building links between communities

Another factor affecting relationships amongst Muslims in Ireland is related to the geographical distance between communities and the lack of links between these communities. Up until 2006 there was no overarching structure linking the diverse Muslim communities across the country. However, in September of that year the Irish Council of Imams was set up with fifteen Imams from all over Ireland represented on it.

The Imam of the Clonee mosque said that interaction between Muslims living in different areas of Ireland has much improved in the past three years. However, he said that there is a perceptible space for improvement:

Basically three years ago we wouldn't even know each other. Now at least we know each other, we have contacts with each other and we sometimes contact each other and especially since the Council of Irish Imams has started, it has given the Irish Imams and scholars an opportunity, the leaders of the Muslim population an opportunity to come and get together on one platform so it has helped.

The Irish Council of Imams has representatives from mosques in Cork, Meath, Dublin, Galway, Waterford and Meath. It brings together Imams from the different communities

and there are hopes that its establishment will add more unity to the Irish Muslim population and improve internal social and cultural interactions.

## Places of private prayer

Finding a place to pray is not limited to finding suitable premises or lands for mosques, it also occurs in schools, colleges and workplaces. However, participants said that finding private places to pray did not cause many difficulties as once they have a clean place to pray it does not matter where it is conducted. Some chose quiet places where they would not be interrupted, some prayed on roads or outside supermarkets and some used empty classrooms. Many said they carried prayer mats to work with them and used these for prayer once a suitable place was found. Nazeer explained that if he is engrossed in the act of prayer he is unaware of people around him:

Sometimes if it is time for prayer, I used to pull over my car on the road, then I can pray on the road. I have no problem. If I am in a shopping centre somewhere and there is a time for the prayer, I can go outside the shopping centre, you know there is grass so I can pray on the grass, so it's not a problem... I always keep my mat with me.

Hanif said that he has never experienced any difficulty finding a place to pray as he finds small clean closed spaces where no-one can see him and he carries his prayer mat in his bag to conduct his prayers. He said that whilst there are no designated areas for Muslims to pray in his college or workplace he feels it is his responsibility to find a place to pray and that it is not the responsibility of the college or the employer.

In Islam there are five daily prayers which are spread throughout the day from sunrise to after sunset. This means that at least one of these prayers falls between the normal working hours of nine to five. This can pose challenges. One man explained that he normally performs the noon and afternoon prayer at work. He said that in winter he would sometimes perform the sunset prayer in work. He explained that whilst there is a prayer room for Christians in the educational institution where he works, there is no specific place for Muslims to pray so he has to try to find an empty room or a corner in a classroom or a lab or a space in the library to perform the prayer. He said this normally does not pose any major problems but it is sometimes difficult to find a quiet place:

I try to get the time when I know that the place is empty... Once I was praying and a friend of mine came in with his two students and he saw me sitting down to conclude my prayer. He came to my shoulder and he tapped me and I didn't listen to him. Then he realised I was praying and he apologised 'oh I'm sorry'. I said 'it's alright I know you don't know'.

As well as schools and colleges, there are also many workplaces in Ireland where there is no space available for Muslim employees to conduct their daily prayers. One Imam said that he is aware of many Muslims who are too shy to request space to conduct their daily prayers.

In Islam it is obligatory for men to conduct the Friday noon prayer in congregation. As Friday is a normal working day in Ireland this can also pose minor challenges. Most Muslims who took part in this research said their bosses were understanding and allowed them to take time off for congregational prayer. However, some did say that they knew of colleagues or friends who would not ask for time off for work.

## Prayer times, celebrations, fasting

The geographical location of Ireland can impact upon the practice of Islam. This is because the five daily prayers and the monthly calendar are determined by the positions of the sun and moon respectively. The first of the five daily prayers takes place at sunrise and in a northern latitude such as Ireland, the time of the first prayer changes substantially through the seasons. During the height of the summer, in June, to take part in the first prayer means rising as early as 3.15 a.m.

Islam operates according to a lunar calendar and this means that Ramadan, the month of fasting, changes every year and shifts through the seasons. During Ramadan, practicing Muslims fast from dawn until sunset. In Ireland, the hours of fasting can change dramatically depending upon the season in which Ramadan falls. Khurram explained that during the winter, Ramadan in Ireland is very easy but during the summer it can be difficult:

During the summer when I came here over 21 years ago Ramadan was in July and I had to fast around twenty hours. And it is hard. It is hard in a sense you feel hungry but is not hard in the sense you don't feel thirsty.

Another challenge that Muslims living in Ireland face is getting time off work to pray or to celebrate the major religious festivals. The end of Ramadan is celebrated with *Eid el Fitr*, which is normally a three day celebration. One Imam explained that because a three day celebration is not possible in Ireland Muslims will normally only come to the mosque on the first day of the celebration for congregational prayer. However, he said that some

years it coincides with an Irish or Christian festival and this means that Muslims can celebrate for three days:

In Muslim countries no-one works and there is a holiday for everybody. But here it might not fall on Saturday or Sunday or on a holiday. It might fall on a working day so people will celebrate very early in the morning and then go to their work. So we wait until the weekend and then take the kids to celebrate.

In Ireland, unlike in Islamic countries where there is a public address system calling Muslims to prayer, Muslims have to have their own way of knowing the prayer times. One participant, Kamran had a radio alarm which broadcast the call to prayer. He showed how he could type in the city where he lives and the clock automatically calculated the prayer times. Each call lasts two minutes. Another interviewee, Kaleem, explained that they are not allowed to broadcast the *adhan* publicly outside the building and in order to overcome this small booklets have been published which give details of the times of prayer and there is a transmitter system which can be used in houses. He said, therefore, that the fact that they cannot broadcast the *adhan* outdoors does not cause problems because there are alternatives and they have adapted to this well.

## Sharia law

Islam has its own system of law called Sharia law. In many Islamic countries this system is implemented at governmental level. Sharia law covers religious practice but it also covers rules relating to non-religious events and to daily living including rules on dress codes, food and conduct in relationships. In Ireland, there is a civil system of law in place to which Muslims living in this country are required to adhere.

Whilst it is not compulsory for Muslims to implement Sharia law in Ireland, it is often implemented within Muslim communities. Kamran explained that there is a rule in Islam stating that if a Muslim goes to live in a non-Islamic country then it is compulsory to obey the law and order of that country and to protect the country in which the Muslim person is living. He said that if a law in that country clashes with Sharia law, then scholars must be consulted. However, he said there is no law in Ireland that clashes with Islamic law and that although alcohol is prohibited in Islam, if a Muslim drinks alcohol in Ireland, he will not be punished.

Although Sharia law is not enforced at government level in Ireland, sometimes if the Muslim community is large enough they will try to implement Sharia law within their community: for example, if a married couple who wish to divorce are unable to resolve their difficulties, Sharia law is sometimes used to try to amicably resolve any problems that occur in relation to property disputes. One man in the Ahmadiyya community said that resolving these cases is often successful and therefore the couple do not need to go to civil courts.

Aahil who is a full-time Imam in a large urban area points out that the implementation of Sharia law in Ireland depends upon the size of the Muslim community and said that he felt confident that Sharia law can work hand in hand with civil law in Ireland.

## *Halal* food and drink

There are regulations in Islam governing the ingestion of food and drink. Animals must be slaughtered in a prescribed manner and some foods and drinks such as pork and alcohol are forbidden. This prohibition can cause challenges for Muslims living in Ireland including the lack of availability of *halal* food and the difficulties posed for Muslims who work in industries where alcoholic products are used, particularly in grocery outlets and restaurants.

The rules relating to food and drink are interpreted differently by different Muslims. One Imam in a large urban area said that whilst it was preferable for Muslims to eat *halal* chicken or lamb (slaughtered in a specific way), it was not compulsory. Another man said he would not eat in a non-Muslim household because he did not want to eat food that was not *halal* whilst another man said he would both eat pork and drink alcohol but not in the company of Muslims who would be offended by his actions.

There are many shops around Ireland providing *halal* food and many cities have a number of *halal* outlets. However, up until the 1990s *halal* shops were very scarce. Samir said his father had to drive a long distance to Dublin to buy *halal* food and products in the 1980s. He said that whilst it was a practical difficulty it was a necessity but that as time has gone on and the community has grown there are now a greater number of *halal* outlets. Some Muslims living in more remote areas still have to drive long distances in order to buy *halal* food.

The rules relating to food and drink also cause difficulties for Muslims who wish to eat in cafes or restaurants in Ireland. Wasim who lives in a small town in the west of Ireland said there are no local restaurants serving *halal* food so if Muslims in the town do want to eat out they have to travel long distances. The number of restaurants in Ireland offering *halal* food is growing. Many educational institutions, hospitals, factories and workplaces also include *halal* options on their menus. Samir said that whilst he used to have to eat fish in restaurants instead of chicken or meat, he now knows of some restaurants in Dublin where you call a few days beforehand and specifically request *halal* steak. He said there are also restaurants providing *halal* food which are owned by Muslims.

Another difficulty relates to knowing whether food is *halal* or not. The researcher conducted one interview with a female Muslim participant in a café in a small town. Before ordering food, the interviewee asked the waitress if any of the cakes contained alcohol. Another young man told of how he ordered a chicken enchilada in a coffee shop and the waitress put bacon in it so he could not eat it. He said he is always conscious about pork when he is eating in Ireland:

... it's great when you're over in Egypt and you know everything is *halal* and you know you're not going to get pork or pig or any type of it so you can just eat whatever's out there whereas here you're kind of watching like, I always find myself watching whether you're in delis or anything.

The prohibition on alcohol results in some Muslims not being able to take jobs or carry out certain types of work or to open restaurants in Ireland. One Imam said that he is sometimes approached by people inquiring about Islamic rulings on certain issues related to living in Ireland. One of these is when they work in restaurants, hotels or supermarkets



and have to deal with alcohol – either carrying, cooking or serving it. He said that if they are working in a supermarket and have to stock material on the shelves and some of the material is alcohol that Muslims should not touch it at all. If they ask him for the ruling relating to this he explains to them that they should not touch alcohol. This also causes problems for people wishing to open restaurants in Ireland:

The restaurant won't work if alcohol isn't sold and that is one major difficulty they face. They ask me about such a question and ask me what is the ruling but unfortunately the ruling is that it is not allowed.

Muslims living in Ireland have found ways to adapt to the scarcity of *halal* food and the prohibition on alcohol. As the population grows there is more availability of *halal* products in towns and cities and at a basic level in order to avoid *haram* products Muslims will adapt a variety of positions.

## Islam and dress codes

There are regulations within Islam that cover everything in life from prayer, fasting and funeral rites to food, drink and dress. Whilst regulations are often interpreted differently they can also cause challenges. In Ireland many Muslim women wear the headscarf which they see is an essential part of their identity. They also often wear long loose clothes that hide the shape of their bodies. Muslim men living in Ireland will often wear a beard or a hat or will wear clothes that come from their country of origin thus often identifiable as distinctively Muslim. The form of dress worn by women in Ireland varies. Some women wear a loose scarf that covers the hair, some wear clothes that cover their hair, face and hands and wear a long flowing gown that goes to the ground. Others wear a

scarf that simply drapes over the shoulder and there are also Muslim women who do not wear scarves and wear Western style dress.

Whilst many debates have sprung up in recent years in a number of European countries regarding the wearing of the headscarf, perhaps most notably in the UK and France, the first time the headscarf debate entered mainstream media in Ireland was relatively recently, in 2008 when a principal of a school in Gorey, County Wexford contacted the Department of Education following a parent's request to allow their daughter wear the headscarf in the school. The school later permitted the girl to wear the *hijab* (McGarry, 2008). Brocklesby (2006), in a study of Muslims in post-primary education in Ireland, has found that the issue of wearing the veil seems to have been satisfactorily resolved in all schools.

The importance of covering up varies amongst Muslim women. For many Muslim women it is a key aspect of practicing their religion. Afsheen from Syria explained she will not go outside her front door without covering her hair, wearing long sleeves and either long trousers or a long skirt. Rafidah, an Irish convert said that for her, wearing the *hijab* is a very important aspect of her religion. She said that the reason she wears it is because she believes God has asked her to wear it. She said that she sometimes gets negative reactions for wearing the *hijab*, especially from other women but that she cannot understand why it is perceived by some people in negative terms:

Those who feel anyway negative towards the *hijab*, we don't understand why. Some women maybe feel that they want to free us from oppression - I don't know what it is but we can't understand why they are intimidated or why they

feel this way because we're actually very very strong. To be able to stand up in Western society and walk around in a *hijab* needs a strong woman.

Islamic dress, in particular the headscarf, beard and long flowing clothes often means that Muslims are easily identifiable as such. This sometimes leads to Muslims being singled out and discriminated either in public places or in terms of seeking employment. This issue will be discussed in the next chapter.

One minor difficulty Muslims living in Ireland face in relation to their dress is the lack of shops that sell Islamic clothing including scarves and robes. However, interviewees said this was not a major problem because there were always people travelling to Islamic countries or to the UK where the clothes were readily available. One woman said that there is one shop in Dublin that she knew of that sold Islamic clothing but the shop did not have a great choice so people mostly depend on Muslims travelling to countries where these shops are plentiful.

## Burial

When a Muslim dies in Ireland their loved ones usually wish that they are buried in an Islamic style and ceremony and in accordance with Islamic rules. However, finding a place of burial has caused difficulties for Muslims living in this country. Part of the reason for this is that there are only a very small number of burial grounds specifically designated for Muslim burials.

The Imam in Waterford explained that there is no cemetery for Muslims in Waterford so Muslims have to travel to Dublin where there is a plot in a cemetery for Muslims. He said having to travel as far as Dublin causes difficulties for those who wish to visit the graves of their loved ones. He explained that one friend lost his son who was buried in Dublin and that they go to visit the grave every few weeks which is a long journey for them.

Even in instances where there are spaces specifically for Muslim burials, these spaces are limited. One man pointed out that the Muslim cemetery in Newcastle in Dublin is not large enough to accommodate the whole Muslim population of Ireland. He said a lot of Muslims living in Ireland choose to send the bodies of their dead relatives or friends to their own countries but if every Muslim in Ireland chose to bury their loved ones in Newcastle the cemetery would be full tomorrow and would be forced to close. He said that he had been approached by Muslims from a number of areas around Ireland who are looking for help in trying to get spaces in their own towns and cities for burials. He pointed out that when a loved one dies people do not like to have to travel so far to visit the grave:

For instance, there are 10,000 Muslims in Cork – why don't they have a Muslim cemetery there? In Galway there is also a big number, but why don't they have a Muslim cemetery over there?

However, unlike in England where the practice of burying bodies in a shroud has been banned, this has not become a problem in Ireland. One man explained that when a Muslim person dies in Ireland, the practice is for the body to be taken to the mortuary, washed according to the Islamic way, shrouded and put in a coffin then taken to the

mosque where prayers are offered. The body is put in a coffin and taken to the cemetery but once at the cemetery the body is taken out of the coffin and buried. The body is usually placed a little bit on its right hand side facing Mecca. He said none of these practices have caused any problems in Ireland.

The Imam of the Ahmadiyya community in Galway explained that another problem is that Irish institutions often view Muslims as one unified unit when in fact there is lots of diversity and different Muslim communities sometimes like to have their own burial grounds. He said that in Pakistan if the Ahmadiyya community bury their members in a Sunni or orthodox Muslim community graveyard that the body can be taken and thrown out. He said whilst there is a space in a graveyard in Galway for Muslim burials, that he was concerned that if he buried an Ahmadiyya member in this space the gravestone may be damaged if it mentions that it is an Ahmadiyya grave.

## Marriage

None of the participants expressed any difficulties in relation to Muslim marriages in Ireland. One participant explained that this is because there is a lot of flexibility when it comes to family affairs in Ireland. He explained that there are four mosques in Ireland that have the right of issuing recognised marriage certificates –the Islamic Cultural Centre in Dublin, the Islamic Foundation of Ireland in Dublin, the Galway mosque and the Cork mosque. He said that each place has been declared solemnisers of marriages so that if someone wishes to marry they go to the registrars and make a notification of an intention of marriage and then they are given an appointment at one of these mosques

where they are married and given an Islamic document and certificate which is then brought to the registry office to be registered on the basis of the ceremony in the mosque. He explained that in the past the couple would have to go through two marriage ceremonies – one at the mosque and one at the registrars but now there is just one ceremony and that is then registered at the registrar's.

The Imam of the Ahmadiyya community explained that they do go through the two marriage ceremonies:

The reason for this is because unfortunately we have seen, not in our community necessarily but in other communities, that if someone marries under Islamic law and then they come to live in Ireland or live in England and they're not married by civil law and suddenly the marriage finishes, because they're not living in an Islamic country, that girl will have absolutely no rights because you can't enforce Islamic law in that country so if she went to a solicitor he would say 'you're not married' so we would insist on civil marriage. The main reason we do this is to protect both parties.

However, he said that the rule within their community to have a civil marriage does not cause problems for them.

## Financial issues – interest

Another issue that Muslims living in Ireland have to deal with is the financial system which involves interest, something which is prohibited in Islam. Again, Muslims interpret this provision differently with some saying it is permitted to deal with interest when living in non-Islamic countries, others saying it is permitted in order to prevent homelessness or destitution and others say it is never permitted. Hanif said it is something that Muslims have to consider when living in a non-Islamic country:

Interest is not good, I don't do interest, I'm not allowed to do interest, I follow the guidance that's in the verse in the Quran, because Allah has said 'don't do interest' and that's it, I don't do that.

Hanif explained that he does not need interest and that if he needs to buy anything he will simply save for it. He said he puts his money in the bank but it is not a bank account that generates interest. His wages are lodged automatically into this account and he withdraws it as he requires.

The Imam of the mosque in Waterford said that whilst interest is forbidden in Islam, sometimes Muslims living in Ireland are forced to take loans out from Irish banks and to pay interest. He explained that if a family has five or six kids they often find it difficult to find a suitable rental property. He said Islamic scholars have decided that the couple is allowed under these circumstances to take a mortgage as otherwise they would end up living on the street. He said that people also come to him asking what they should do with the interest they have earned on their savings. He said that usually they give this money to poor people or give it to charity.

Wahab is a successful businessman who is originally from Pakistan. He arrived in Ireland in the 1970s and is very involved in the Pakistani community. He said he often helps newcomers arriving in Ireland with financial and business problems they encounter. However, he said he sometimes finds it difficult as some new arrivals will not deal with banks because of the religious prohibition on interest. He related one story of a young man who came to Ireland and wanted to set up a business but did not want to deal with

the bank because of the prohibition on interest. Wahab told the man that if he had enough money he would not have to deal with the bank but the man did not have a large amount of money so Wahab encouraged him to go to the bank. Wahab explained to him that because he was not living in a Muslim country that he could deal in interest. Wahab said the man eventually agreed to go to the bank but only after three or four days discussion. Wahab related another story of a man who had four children and wanted to buy a house because he could not rent a house suitable for four children. The man would not take out a mortgage because of the prohibition on Islam. Again Wahab explained that because he was not living in an Islamic country interest was not prohibited.

## Muslim children and religion

Many of those interviewed who have children spoke about their desire to educate their children about the Islamic religion. However, this often poses challenges as there are only two Muslim national schools in the country, both in Dublin, so Muslim children often go to Catholic-run schools. This means that Islamic education generally takes place in the home or in local mosques where classes on the Quran and Arabic are often taught on a daily basis.

Most of the parents interviewed had children who attended Catholic schools. In general this posed no problems although parents dealt with the issue of religious education in different ways. One man said that he requested his children be withdrawn from class during religious lessons, another man said that he was fine about the children learning about Catholicism but he did ask that the teacher inform him and his wife of what was



being taught during religious lessons so they could decide on whether they should stay in class or be taken out.

Parents also sometimes consciously chose to send their children to Catholic schools.

Wahab said they sent both of their children to a Catholic school because they believed it was the best education on offer in Ireland. He said his children were the only Muslims attending the school but that the school was extremely supportive particularly during Ramadan. He told of one instance where the principal addressed the school about Ramadan and explained what it was about and requested that students in the school assist his children during the month of fasting.

Adult participants who had themselves attended Catholic schools spoke in positive terms about their experiences. Wasim grew up in Ireland but his family are Pakistani. He was sent to a Catholic boarding school and said he felt that his education gave him a great foundation for life in Ireland. However, he said he feels it is very difficult for Muslim children living in the western world because they can get caught between two worlds – that of their parents and that of Ireland:

Their parents are still very ethnic, still very culturally attached to their own country, they would still speak their own language, whereas their children when they leave the home they go to school they speak English, when they come back they speak their own language from whichever country they're from and that breeds disillusionment and it's not a very, it's not an easy thing.

The dearth of Islamic schools can also impact upon the practice of religion as Muslim children find themselves immersed in a social world that has little or nothing to do with

their religion. Aiman said that as a child he played with other Muslim children and practiced his religion but that when he went to secondary school he grew away from religion and stopped going to the mosque and although there may have been one or two Muslims in his school it was not something he looked out for or spoke about.

## Conclusion

Ireland has traditionally been a religiously homogenous society. This means that Muslims in Ireland have to adapt to their wider surroundings in order to facilitate the practice of their religion. As the majority of Muslims in Ireland are immigrants with a lesser number of second and third generation immigrants as well as converts, the first point of challenge is often to find a suitable place of worship. Muslims in Ireland will often use existing houses or warehouses on industrial premises for the purposes of a mosque and this involves adapting existing facilities for religious purposes. Challenges to religious practice also exist in terms of finding suitable places for prayer in work places and educational establishments, getting time off work for prayer or for the celebration of religious festivals and fasting during the long daylight hours of an Irish summer. Muslims adapt to existing legislation in Ireland by adhering to Irish civil law but by also adhering to Sharia law where a community is large enough to facilitate this. They also adapt in a variety of ways to Irish society and culture in order to continue abiding by Islamic prohibitions. These include having to find ways to avoid *haram* or prohibited foods or drinks, to ensure burial and wedding ceremonies are conducted according to Islamic rules, to avoid or limit dealing with financial matters that involve interest and to ensure their children receive an acceptable level of Islamic education. Each of these areas pose

certain challenges for the Muslim population in Ireland, however, these challenges have been and continue to be overcome and none, to date, have been insurmountable.

## **Chapter 7: Interactions with non-Muslim Irish society**

It is remarkable, given its physical insignificance – it is only a hairstyle, after all – the impact a beard worn by a man of my complexion has on your fellow countrymen. More than once, travelling on the subway – where I had always had the feeling of seamlessly blending in – I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers.

(Mohsin, 2007: 148)

### **Introduction**

This chapter takes a look at the challenges faced by Muslims in relation to their interaction and integration with the wider Irish society. The section starts by looking at incidents of discrimination experienced by Muslims living in Ireland. Participants felt that the reason these incidents occur is primarily because of a lack of knowledge and understanding about Islam in Ireland which is fuelled by misrepresentations in the media. There was an acknowledgement that the media often cover stories relating to the minority of Muslims who engage in acts of violence so the next section takes a look at how militant activities by Muslims in other parts of the world can impact upon Muslims living in Ireland. The chapter also explores other challenges faced by Muslims in relation to their interaction with the wider Irish society. These include dress, employment, dealings with the opposite sex, prohibitions on food and drink, language and cultural differences, apathy of the Irish population and peer pressure from within the Muslim community.

## Experiences of discrimination

Almost every participant who took part in this research had direct experience of discrimination whilst living in Ireland. Others were aware of or had heard of incidents of discrimination directed against Muslims. These instances ranged from a sense of being singled out or stared at to material damage of property and in one instance to physical abuse.

One of the most common difficulties that interviewees talked about was the sense of being stared at or singled out. One young woman explained that people often look at her in a strange way when she is wearing her traditional dress, gown and scarf. Another woman said she sometimes feels shy walking down the streets in the town because of the way people look at her - particularly in the summer when local women are wearing summery clothes and she is covered and wearing the *hijab*.

Male and female interviewees felt that women were more often the victims of discrimination than men. They felt the reason for this is because women are often more easily identifiable as Muslim due to their clothing which often includes a head covering or a long gown. Muhib from Nigeria explained that he faces challenges because of his ethnicity but women from his ethnic background face greater challenges because of their faith identified by their wearing of the *hijab*. He said women are often stared at, receive dirty looks or even verbal abuse. Imran recounted one incident when his wife's family

from Pakistan were in Ireland for a holiday so he brought them to a nearby park for a picnic. All of the women were wearing the *hijab*:

Now the park was full of people - absolutely chocker-block. There were barbeques and families playing all around. And I will never forget that as soon as we walked into that place there was a sudden stop – without any exaggeration – a complete stop and then staring. I saw in the older generation some anger, you know ‘how dare you come to our country’ this type of thing. This is what I felt.

A number of Muslim men said that when they wear traditional dress or clothing identifiable as Islamic then they too have been singled out. Imran said that when he wears traditional Pakistani clothes people stare at him so he normally wears jeans or trousers. He recalled one instance when he had to collect his son from school and had no time to change. He was wearing traditional Pakistani clothes as well as a hat:

I went to the school and I picked my son up but on the way back I had to pop into the shop to get some milk and bread. The media at that time was all about Al Qaida and they were discussing about home grown terrorists, home grown Al Qaida, home grown suicide bombers and even Ireland came into this in the newspapers during that week. I remember walking into that shop that day and I go to that shop every day and they know me. When I went to the shop in this attire, the whole shop stopped and stared and the first thing that was on their faces was ‘oh my God they’re here also’ and in my mind I was saying ‘no no, I am not like those people’. I just smiled because that’s all I could do.

Muhib said that he has attracted unwanted attentions by virtue of his appearance particularly when he is with his wife and children and that he noticed it recently in Sligo airport when he was getting a flight back to Dublin. People were staring at him although he was not doing anything strange and he said he felt the security guys were paying particular attention to him:

The type of attention we attract to ourselves at the airport for instance - it's different. Nobody wants to speak with you, nobody wanted to sit beside me, everyone is watching you.

Imran has also experienced people singling him out in a crowd and he feels that this comes down to a lack of what he terms 'acceptance':

I'll tell you what I mean by acceptance. If I can express it, because you can only feel it. If I walk down Galway in trousers and a shirt and I don't wear any symbol of Islam then people may just consider me another Irishman walking down the road so nothing will be said to me. If I walk down wearing a topi, a hat, which is a clear symbol of Islam you would see a reaction, you would see faces twisting, people staring, even some comments. If I walk with my wife and she wears the *hijab* there is definitely a reaction, people are staring and looking.

In addition to the feeling of being singled out and stared at, many participants said they had experienced name-calling and taunts. Nazeer from Pakistan said he had experienced many instances of name-calling. He felt that these instances were related to the fact that he was identifiable as a Muslim by virtue of him wearing a long beard. He explained that when he arrived in Ireland first he was clean shaven and experienced no discrimination. However, when he grew a beard he said that everything changed and people have often called him names. He said he stopped getting the bus to work because no-one would sit beside him even when the bus was packed. He recalled one incident where a man in his thirties got on the bus and said 'hey, look who is in the bus, Osama'. Another man – Kamran – said he also experienced being called 'Osama bin Laden'.

Many participants experienced or were aware of other Muslims being called names or being identified wrongly. Some were incorrectly called Romanian or Arab or Paki and

interviewees felt that this showed the lack of knowledge amongst people in Ireland about Islam and about different cultures.

Imran who travels around Ireland giving talks about Islam recalled one incident which occurred when he was in a village with a group of Muslims and they were standing outside a fish and chip shop when a group of Irish youths started shouting at them 'you Muslims go home'. He said that in another village around sixteen people attended his lecture but some of them were upset and questioning him, asking 'why are you here, why are you doing this?' They also told him that the local priest was not keen that the lecture was taking place.

Imran said he also often puts a stall up in a city street where he provides information to people about Islam and displays books and has a banner. He said he gets abuse from some people but a lot of people also come looking for information. He explained that the reaction has varied:

Some people have been very very positive. Some people have been very aggressive. There's one particular man, every time he sees me he abuses me - shouts at me - and I just smile back at him. This is natural and you expect this. I do it purely to try and remove misconceptions. After 7-7 for example I went straight on the street the next day. I deliberately went on the high street - not to preach - but to let people come and say something to me and they did and with great anger and one man said to me 'you are very brave man to be out here today' and I said 'if I am not here, who else is going to tell you the truth about Islam?'

Rafidah, an Irish woman who converted to Islam almost thirty years ago said that she has experienced racist attitudes and behaviour but only in the past two years. She said she



often feels that people stare at her when she is driving and she understands why people do, particularly if it is a hot day as they might be wondering ‘how is she bearing her *hijab*?’ However, she recalled one recent incident when she was driving home on the M50 and was stuck in traffic with her window open. A car with three ‘lads’ in it pulled up beside her and one of them shouted ‘what are you trying to prove going around in that gear driving a car?’ and they used ‘foul’ words to her. She said she responded by turning up the radio volume and she left her window open to show it was not affecting her. She recalled another incident when a woman told her to go back to her own country.

These types of incidents however are not necessarily limited to the past few years.

Khurram recalls that in the 1980s he was walking down O’Connell Street in Dublin and someone shouted ‘Salman Rushdie’ at him. He said he thinks this was because the women in his family were wearing scarves. However, he does point out that nothing had happened since then until very recently when a neighbour’s kids threw eggs at their house.

Children too are sometimes targeted because of their religion. Kamran, who lives in a Dublin suburb, said that sometimes children attending religious classes at his house have experienced difficulties in school because of their religion. One student who was fasting told how children were making fun of him at school. Once the student talked to his teacher the problem stopped. He also said Muslim children are sometimes called terrorists in school but added that it does not happen often.

Often the instances of being stared at or verbally abused were overt and public. However, there are also more subtle versions of discrimination. Aiman said he has a laugh with his friends who tease him light-heartedly about Islam but that he had a negative experience with his girlfriend's parents who were against him purely because he was Muslim. However, he explained that when they met him and realised he had a big thick Dublin accent they were fine but he found it worrying that they did not like him before they knew him.

A number of participants also experienced incidents where there was material damage to property including graffiti as well as physical violence. Kamran who spoke in very positive terms about his experiences in Ireland said he had experienced name calling and another more sinister incident during which his house was targeted with graffiti. He pointed out however that those who wrote the graffiti were young. It is interesting to note that three of the interviewees who had experienced negative incidents involving youths or teenagers felt that these incidents did not warrant a lot of attention because of the age of those involved. Akifah, for example said that they were teenagers and therefore they were children and they were innocent whilst Kamran said 'I wouldn't even describe them as Irish, they were youngsters':

They had paint and they just wrote some offensive words against the wall of the mosque. They used the word 'Paki' and they wrote 'Pakis out, out of Ireland' and 'get out' and things like that. It definitely was not a pleasant experience.

Fakeeh from Nigeria is a cheerful man who is very positive about his life in Ireland. He is an Imam at a Nigerian mosque in a city. However, he said they had to leave the premises

they were originally using as a mosque because they had a very tough time with the locals who threw eggs and stones at them and at the building. He said one boy of nine was hit with a stone on his forehead. He recalled another incident when he was returning home from an event organised by the International Federation for Peace Organisation where he had been presented with an Ambassador of Peace Award. He stopped at a garage to fill his car. He was wearing a turban and his native clothes when a man came up and hit him. This was the only incident of physical violence recalled by any of the participants.

Whilst many of the participants had negative experiences, there were also those who had only positive experiences of their time in Ireland. Rafidah said that the majority of people in Ireland react well to Muslims:

Ninety percent of the wider society, the Irish community at large, are very positive about Muslims. Naturally at times of crisis Islam hits the headlines as sensationalism and then negativity is everywhere. So you will get the racial problem at times and the racist remarks but, as I say, ninety percent of the time it's very good here.

However, there was also an element of wariness directed at the Irish non-Muslim population as a result of negative experiences. Despite the fact that the participants acknowledged that these incidents were rare occurrences and were carried out by a minority of the population, it did lead to feelings of disappointment, anger and hurt by those who experienced them. All of those who experienced incidents of racism or discrimination explained it by saying that Irish people did not have a clear or proper understanding of Islam and that more information was needed. They felt that part of the

reason for this lack of knowledge was misconceptions about Islam amongst the public and that this often stemmed from the portrayal of Islam in the media.

## Misconceptions and fears

Many participants felt that misconceptions about Islam and Muslims are prevalent in Irish society. These misconceptions relate to many different aspects of Islam but can also relate to immigrant cultures and countries of origin. Participants expressed the view that the misconception which causes most challenges and is most common is related to the view of Islam as a violent religion. Participants felt that this often results in fear and alienation and can ultimately lead to episodes of discrimination. Dinar explained that Islam is a religion of tolerance and forgiveness but that in Ireland, and in the Western World in general, a lot of people see Islam in a way that is at odds with the heart of the religion:

They believe when you are a Muslim you are Bin Laden or you are bombers or you are this, you are that.

A number of reasons were put forward for the prevalence of misperceptions. The main reason put forward was that people in Ireland learned about Islam and Muslims through the media rather than through direct interaction with Muslims. However, there were also stories of misinformation being given in schools. For example, Khurram said his son was told by his teacher that Muhammad whispered God's commands into the ear of a camel. He said he went himself to the teacher to address the problem and explain the truth.

Imran decided that he would try to address the issue of misunderstandings about Islam by presenting a series of lectures about Islam in towns, villages and schools around the country. He explained that he decided to develop the series called 'Understanding Islam' following his experiences of fear directed towards him and the perceptions that many people have of Muslims as dangerous people. He felt there was an ugly image of Islam evident on the streets in Ireland and that he had to address this. He explained that his aim is to introduce Islam, to remove misconceptions, and to reassure people that Islam is not a radical, militant, terrorist organisation type of religion. He said that the main questions he has been asked on these lectures are about *jihad*, the oppression of women, terrorist activities and suicide bombings.

Participants put forward a number of reasons for the fact that Irish people have misconceptions about Islam. The most common reason put forward was related to the portrayal of Islam in the media. Another was because people based their views on what other people have said rather than direct experience or going to the original sources of the religion. One person said that he felt people sometimes equate Islam with acts carried out by Muslims rather than distinguishing between the religion and the people. Others put it down to a general lack of communication, knowledge, information and understanding.

## Media portrayals

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was related to media portrayals of Islam. The topic often arose without a question specifically directed at it. Many felt that part of the reason for prevalent misunderstandings of their religion was because of the way Islam

is portrayed in the media. They felt that media representations fuel misunderstandings which in turn leads to incidents of discrimination. There was a widespread view expressed that the media, both in Ireland and internationally, regularly portrays Islam in a negative light thus sowing seeds for misunderstandings and prejudice. McPhee (2005: 65) also found in her study of Muslims in Ireland that the media was viewed by many of her interviewees as a negative institution and that the media has the potential to play a major role in the integration of Muslim communities.

Another concern was that the public's view of Islam is often largely informed by what they read, hear and see in the media rather than through direct experience and that therefore the media should have a responsibility to portray Islam and Muslims in a true light. Participants felt that the media twist stories and give the wrong impression of Islam which leads to fear, misunderstanding and discrimination as well as a reluctance on the part of the public to get to know individual Muslims. Kamran felt that fear of Islam comes from this lack of communication between Muslims and Irish people in general:

A normal common man in the west understands Islam through the picture which has been taught to him through the media. And he doesn't focus on communication with Muslims and then a gap is created between the people and the Muslims living in the west.

A number of interviewees expressed the opinion that individuals who have negative views of Islam are not responsible for their views but that instead, the media are to blame. Kamran, for example, explained that when his neighbours complained about the use of his house as a mosque he blamed negative media reports about Muslims and Islam:

If I wasn't a Muslim I think that I would also feel prejudices against Muslims - because of what's going on in the media and the news against Muslims and the negative image of Muslims that is portrayed through the media. And I don't blame my neighbours. They have been seeing Muslims with beards and Arabic clothes and from lots of different nationalities coming into the housing estate every Friday and of course they just got worried.

Rafidah said she felt the media were also responsible for a misconception in the West about women's role in Islam. She said she was annoyed by the portrayal of Islam in the media and the way it is represented as a religion that oppresses women. Again she said she does not blame individual Irish people who have these misconceptions as she said they are fed the incorrect images by the media who highlight the oppression of women as an Islamic issue rather than as a cultural practice by some Muslims.

Participants expressed the view that Irish responses to them changed according to what was being said in the media at that time. Aahil said that if there is a negative story about Islam or Muslims in the media that this is reflected by the way people respond to him in public around that time:

They don't really say it but you can feel it from their look and how they look at you, how they talk, how they react.

Interviewees felt that the media generalise about Islam and Muslims following terrorist acts rather than emphasising the individuals who carried out the attacks. Aiman said that Muslims all over the world suffer as a result of all Muslims being portrayed as terrorists. He felt the media turn terrorist acts such as 9/11 into religious wars:

If that fellow was Jewish and he was living in the Bahamas they'd just go in, get the fellow in the Bahamas, they wouldn't wage a religious war on the country.

Participants pinpointed a number of areas where they felt the media were being unfair in their treatment of Islam. These included one-sided reports, sensationalism and incorrect facts. A number of participants expressed the view that the media often gives space and coverage to extremists who people then think are representative of the majority of Muslims. They felt these Muslims claim to represent other Muslims but that no one has the right to claim to represent all Muslims. One man said that the media is not balanced because they always seem to concentrate on the five percent of the Muslim world who perpetrate violent acts and they do not concentrate on the majority of the Muslim world.

Kamran illustrated this by the media coverage of an event in Dublin a few months previously. He explained that there was a public debate in Trinity College. Around four people from an extremist organisation in the UK were on one panel. They expressed their support for the 9/11 attacks. The other panel was made up of a group, including Kamran, who spoke out against the 9/11 attacks. Kamran explained that the audience were in support of this latter group and he felt confident that the media attending the event would therefore present their point of view. However, the next day there was a large article in a national newspaper quoting the extremist group. Kamran expressed the view that if people read this article they would understandably think that Islam is extreme and therefore would not understand the religion. He felt that this was an example of the media failing to live up to their responsibility of presenting the truth.



The coverage given to extremist voices in the media was a source of frustration for a number of participants. Samir said he felt the vast majority of Muslims are left with no voice in the media whilst the minority are given lots of coverage:

It's irresponsible reporting. If you're going to give them voice, give the same time to the other opinion as well. Have some balance. Al Mahjiroun have been here several times and they will probably come again but I'm disappointed they are allowed to come over here and then they're given voice and space on radio and TV. It sells papers and media time but I don't think it helps the cause... I think the media has to make money and their business is not to educate people.

Others felt that the unwanted attention directed at Muslims wearing traditional style dress is because of the media portrayal of Muslims as extremists. Aiman, for example, said the public in Ireland have it in their heads that any guy who wears robes or scarves is an extremist Muslim when in reality it is just a traditional way of dressing.

A number of participants also felt that the western media's coverage of events in Islamic countries such as Iraq or Pakistan was often one-sided. Hanif, for example, said that if one American is killed you might see a headline reading 'suicide bomb by extremists' and at the same time he said that tonnes of bombs have been dropped by the U.S. and millions of people killed in Iraq and this is not given as much coverage.

Perhaps ironically, the sense that Muslims and Islam have been misrepresented in the media has led to the reluctance on the part of some Muslims to speak to the media and therefore portray their own version of events. One Imam, for example, said he was warned by a friend not to deal with the media as his statements would be twisted and it

would cause trouble and therefore he is reluctant to respond to requests for comments.

However, for some participants, including Samir, this lack of a properly co-ordinated way of dealing with the media, is contributing to the problem and needs to be addressed:

I think we need to have a more professional way of presenting who we are and what we do and what we stand for because the media doesn't do that for us at all. In fact I would say on the whole in general the media does a disservice to what Islam is, or to issues within Islam, it doesn't really give a proper detailed in-depth analysis.

Another interviewee said he felt that part of the problem was that there was a lack of representation amongst the Muslim community and that often someone claiming to represent Muslims speaks to the media on behalf of all Muslims in Ireland when in reality there are divergent voices and opinions.

## Impact of militancy

As pointed out previously, the views of the Muslim population in Ireland relating to militancy within their religion are diverse. However there was an acknowledgement that the militant actions by Muslims in one part of the world can and does have an impact on the daily lives of Muslims in far flung areas. Whilst many of the participants felt that the media were to blame for the instances of discrimination and prejudice, a number felt that ultimately it was the minority of Muslims who carried out suicide attacks and terrorist activities that were responsible as they influence the media and therefore public perceptions. At its most basic level, participants said they were emotionally affected when they heard of Muslim militant activities. Some said they were saddened and angered when Muslims were involved in terrorist acts in the international world. They

felt that it was Muslims themselves who were involved in misrepresenting their religion which for them was a religion of peace. Sayyid said Islam suffered as a result of their actions:

For us as a religious people, the atrocity is not only the killing of innocent people. What is maybe more ugly is that they are killing people in the name of Islam. They have hijacked Islam before they have hijacked the airplanes.

Alim who has lived in Ireland for over forty years echoed this sense of disbelief as well as sadness that Islam is used as a pretext for carrying out acts of violence. Kamran, on the other hand, felt angry towards those who carried out the terrorist activities because he felt they were going against Islam and harming Islam whilst at the same time claiming to carry the acts out in the name of Islam. He said it also made him sad because it results in widespread prejudices against Islam and Muslims. Muhib, said that these activities impact upon his daily life:

People are dying physically in those events but I die everyday because I suffer the effect of those acts of Muslims who go out and kill people. I get killed everyday when I come to a shopping centre, when I go to the airport. I get killed on that day because those events really influenced the way I am perceived. I wasn't seen as a human being, I was seen as a Muslim and I was seen as a threat... so this is wrong.

There was a sense that militant acts carried out by Muslims in other parts of the world have a direct impact on Muslims living in Ireland and affects the way they are perceived. Interviewees felt that militant acts led to a backlash against Muslims living in Western countries like Ireland, particularly against those who are clearly visible as being Muslim. Imran, for example, said that wearing a beard is important for him as it is a symbol of being a Muslim and as a convert he wants to be recognised as Muslim. However, he said

that following terrorist acts carried out by Muslims, people started to see him as a militant rather than a Muslim and he was taunted and teased so he cut his beard much shorter and completely changed his dress sense.

Militant acts carried out by Muslims, sometimes in the name of Islam, can and do impact upon the relationships between Muslims living in Ireland and the wider Irish society.

Muslims living in Ireland feel that public perceptions of Islam are informed by these acts and by their coverage in the media and that they influence the way Muslims are treated in public. It also affects the way Muslims present themselves and can result in them altering their preferred mode of dress in order to escape discriminatory behaviour.

## Language/cultural differences

The majority of Muslims living in Ireland are immigrants. Many come from countries where their first language is something other than English. This means that language can often operate as a barrier to integration. There was a consensus amongst the interviewees that Muslims who are unable to speak English lose out on a huge aspect of the social and cultural life of Ireland. A few interviewees said that many men who have come from Pakistan can speak English but their wives who follow them often cannot speak the language and this makes life very difficult for them as they are unable to communicate with the wider Irish society. One man pointed out that this lack of communication fosters a spirit of isolation rather than integration. Another man said that many people in his community cannot speak English and therefore they find interaction with Irish people very difficult so they tend to stick with each other rather than mixing.

A woman who lives in a town in the west of Ireland said that many of her female friends cannot speak English and this causes huge problems for them in their daily lives. It means they are not able to carry out basic tasks such as exchanging items in a shop, filling out forms or dealing with the schools where their children are attending. She helps her friends with these things but said the inability to speak English has a huge impact on their lives as it results in people feeling shy and prevents them from going out in public as they are afraid they will not be understood:

Some are very shy and I have a nieces and cousins they have no English and if they meet any man on the street and if he spoke to them they'd be mixed up and shaking and nervous.

Another area where the inability to speak English can impact upon an individual is in the health services. Kaleem said he accompanied his wife to hospital on her first check-up when she was pregnant. He said that whilst his wife does speak English she would not know medical terms so he offered to go with her to see the doctor but he was refused so his wife was faced with a medical examination where she would not understand what the doctor was saying.

Despite the fact that there was a widespread recognition of the importance of speaking English in Ireland, a number of interviewees also said they felt it was also important for Muslims to continue speaking the language of their country of origin or of their parent's country of origin. Wasim said these languages were part of their identity and should be encouraged but it should not come in the way of learning English. One Imam said he

encouraged people in his community to teach their children their own language as well as Arabic. He felt that learning their own language would help sustain relationships with other members of their family in their country of origin whilst Arabic was important for understanding their religion and this would save them from bad habits.

However, one man felt that the stress in the home on speaking the language of the country of origin resulted in further isolation. He said that kids born in the area where he lives can speak English but that their first language is Urdu or Punjabi because even though their parents have been in Ireland for twenty-five years or longer they still do not speak English.

Most interviewees placed a greater stress on the importance of learning English rather than continuing to speak the language of the country they came from and some felt that learning English should be the first priority of immigrants arriving in Ireland. One man said that it was important to learn English as he felt it was right to try to accommodate the society in which he lives rather than forcing people within that society to change to accommodate him. However, others felt that Ireland and Irish society also had a part to play in accommodating immigrants including providing language classes.

A number of participants felt that more information on Ireland should be provided in Arabic to cater for the growing Muslim population. Kaleem, for example, explained that whilst many Muslims can speak English, they may not be fluent and it is more difficult to read English than it is to speak it. Therefore he felt that information from service

providers should be available in Arabic. He said the Health Service Executive provide information on their website in a number of languages but not in Arabic and this is despite the fact there is a large Muslim population in Ireland who speak Arabic.

The recognition of the importance of learning English was also evident from the fact that a number of participants had personally gotten involved in setting up English classes or teaching it themselves. Afsheen, in a small town in the West of Ireland, said that she tried to set up English classes but could not get support in the area. The English born wife of one man in Dublin said she visited the homes of Pakistani women in order to help them learn English and they were very enthusiastic. She explained that these women 'wanted to learn but they did not know where to go to get the teaching'. English classes were also set up in recent years in the Islamic Cultural Centre in Clonskeagh. One participant explained that the classes were set up in an attempt to break down barriers of communication caused by the inability to speak English as well as to help integration. One man said he felt that not enough was being done by the local authority in his area or by the government to encourage integration through the provision of language courses.

### *Haram* food and drink

Participants expressed the view that the social hub for people in Ireland is often the pub and this causes difficulties for Muslims because of the prohibition on alcohol. McPhee (2005: 55) found that alcohol and the Irish pub scene were major barriers in terms of integration of the Muslim population in Ireland. However, this research has found that Muslims have found ways to deal with this challenge. The majority of interviewees did

not drink alcohol or go into pubs. However, a number of participants said they do go into pubs but will only drink minerals. One man in the Ahmadiyya community said that frequenting a pub is not encouraged amongst his community but it is acceptable for university students to occasionally go into a pub and have a lemonade as this is better than the Muslim student becoming isolated from their social circle. However, he said that in general the social life of his community is small and they do tend to socialise amongst themselves partly because of the ruling forbidding alcohol.

However, there are Muslims living in Ireland who do drink alcohol. Aiman said he frequents pubs and drinks alcohol regularly whilst another older man said that although he does drink alcohol he will not do so in the company of practicing Muslims out of respect for their religious views.

The very public nature of drinking in pubs can act as a powerful deterrent for Muslims. If a Muslim is seen drinking alcohol publicly it can impact on family relationships and result in a stigma within their community. One elderly Pakistani man said there was a strong community network amongst the Pakistani population in Ireland and this meant that if a Pakistani person drinks alcohol in public, their family generally finds out because 'everybody watches everybody'. He said that part of the reason for this is because of the consensus that alcohol and drugs have the potential to ruin a family.

The potential stigma attached to drinking alcohol can also mean that drinking alcohol can become a very private affair. One man was reluctant to discuss the issue as he was



concerned that talking about it could impact on the way he was treated in his community and that people would lose respect for him. However, following reassurance of anonymity he said he himself drinks alcohol but also knows many Muslim men who also drink. However, he said he feels it is a very unhealthy drinking because 'it's not open, it's all hidden, you know kind of behind walls and that sort of thing'. He said that if people in the Muslim community become aware that someone in their midst is drinking alcohol that it would result in a lot of talking and bad feeling towards that person.

Many of those interviewed said they felt the centrality of the pub for socialising in Ireland was a barrier to interaction with the wider society. Wasim, for example, said the social life in the town where he lives is centred around the pub. This means that if Muslims do not go to the pubs they lose out on a major chunk of social activity. However, he said he does not think Muslims in Ireland feel totally comfortable in a pub even if they drink lemonade because there is a taboo associated with the pub and there is a fear that people will stare at them and will be watching them to see if they drink alcohol.

Others felt that the centrality of the pub is a barrier to developing relationships with Irish people. One young Muslim third-level student said he did not have any Irish friends. He felt that part of the reason for this was that friendships in Ireland revolved around drink:

To make friends in Ireland you have to go to pubs or nightclubs and as a Muslim I can't do this and that, that is the barrier for me.

The prohibition on pork and on meat not slaughtered in a certain way can also throw up difficulties for Muslims in Ireland. Participants felt that the lack of the availability of *halal* food during public social occasions and the lack of knowledge amongst Irish people about *halal* food can inhibit relationships. One man said that attending social functions in Ireland can cause problems for Muslims because *halal* food may not be available.

However, he also pointed out that most factories, companies and colleges in Ireland do now provide *halal* food and the situation is improving. Another man from Nigeria said that whilst he has many Christian friends in Ireland, he will not go to their house for dinner purely because he knows there will not be *halal* food on offer.

One woman, felt that Islamic restrictions and prohibitions relating to food, drink and clothing had a deep impact on relationships between Muslims and Irish people. She explained that in the town where she lives she became aware of the fact that Muslim children do not play with Irish children. She said that she has tried to talk to the Muslim kids and encourage them to play with the Irish children but she thinks that Islamic rules and restrictions such as having to wear a *hijab*, not being allowed to go to pubs and discos, not permitted to drink alcohol or eat pork cause barriers between them:

These differences make them uncomfortable with the Irish and the Irish uncomfortable with Muslims. Muslims feel these things are *haram* and if you do them you'll go straight to hell so these things create a gap.

A number of participants felt that increased availability of knowledge about Islam would alleviate the challenges caused by the centrality of the pub in Irish life as it would bring about mutual understanding. However, there was a sense too that the gap caused by the

different attitudes towards alcohol would never completely disappear. One man said he felt the gap was partly caused by a suspicion and fear of Muslims towards Western societies and by the idea that dancing and drinking are evil. He felt that this generates fear and explained that they then feel their children must be protected and this sometimes result in isolation from Irish society. (See Chapter 6: 200 for additional discussion on rules relating to food and drink).

### Dress as a barrier?

As discussed previously, for many Muslim women, wearing a head scarf is an essential part of following their faith (see Chapter 6: 202). Muslim women will sometimes wear the *hijab* which covers the hair and sometimes a full *burkha* which covers the face except for the eyes. They will also often wear long loose clothing to hide the contours of their body. This means that they are often easily identifiable as Muslim.

Rafidah wears the *hijab* as do her daughters. She said she feels it is an important aspect of her religion. However, she expressed reservations about the wearing of the full *burkha* as she felt it can act as a barrier to interaction and communication. She said that whilst she admires the woman for covering as she feels it takes a strong woman to wear the *hijab* in Western society, she does not like the practice of covering up completely as she feels that in order to be approachable, people have to see your face in order to interact and that a smile breaks down a hundred and one barriers so if your face is covered you cannot do this. She said that the full covering is a barrier to interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim, amongst Muslim women, the full-covering does not pose any obstacles:

I'll walk along the street with a sister who is wearing a *nikab* and I wouldn't even see that *nikab* because I know her and I'll be chatting with her and I have seen her without her *nikab* so that's who I'm talking to. At times I'm blissfully walking along not realising why people are looking, and then I'd say 'they're looking at you in your *nikab* more than me in my *hijab*' and say 'you baffle me' but I won't insult her because I do admire the woman underneath.

As discussed above, those who wear the *hijab*, *burkha* or other clothing associated with Islam often feel targeted by looks, verbal abuse and suspicion as they are immediately identifiable as Muslims. However, there is also a perception amongst some Muslims that the *burkha*, in which the eyes are the only visible part of the body, can prevent constructive and positive relationships between these women and the wider Irish society.

## Employment

A place of employment is often a place where social relationships are built up and developed. It can provide a social network for the employee and an environment in which immigrant groups can learn about the new society and culture of which they have become a part. Therefore, when there are difficulties relating to employment these can have ramifications for the individual that go beyond the economic. Participants said they had experienced, or were aware of, a number of problems with regard to employment. These include employers not hiring women who wear the *hijab* and difficulties finding jobs that are Sharia compliant.

A number of participants felt that Muslim women often faced more difficulties than men in trying to find a job. Part of the reason put forward for this was that Muslim women who wear the *hijab* were immediately identifiable as Muslim and were discriminated

against on this basis. Muhib, for example, said his wife who has a degree in economics has been unable to get a job since arriving in Ireland from Nigeria in 2000. This is despite being called for numerous interviews. He said that she has arrived for interviews where people have been shocked because she wears the *hijab*. He said he was aware of many other Nigerian women who wear the *hijab* and who have experienced difficulties trying to gain employment. He said that at certain interviews, particularly in the caring service, women have been told that if they want the position they cannot wear the *hijab*. When they asked why not, they were told it was because the people they will be caring for do not want to be attended to by people in *hijab*. Rafidah said she also feels that the *hijab* can result in discrimination when it comes to employment. However, she said the situation, whilst not at an ideal level yet, is improving in Ireland.

Clearly Muslims living in Ireland feel that discrimination exists in relation to the employment of Muslim women who wear the *hijab*. However, Muhib explained that he does not feel this discrimination is across all sectors:

What I've found is that many of these people that take objection to hiring Muslims that are wearing *hijab*, they're not objecting if these Muslims are going to give services that are considered to be in shortage in this country - like the healthcare people, the doctors, the nurses - they don't discriminate against Muslims there, that's what I've found. So why is it that when they go for jobs of different categories, if you have to compete with Irish people to get into those jobs, then they start to discriminate against you?

Another problem participants said they experienced in relation to employment is finding jobs which are Sharia compliant. Jobs which are not Sharia compliant include those in financial institutions as interest is prohibited in Islam, caring jobs where people of the

opposite sex look after each other and jobs in restaurants and pubs and other places where alcohol is served or sold. One man explained that carer jobs are problematic as it would be unfair for prospective employees to demand that they only attend to one specific gender. He said this is a great challenge for Muslims living in the West. The prohibition on alcohol can also cause problems for Muslims seeking employment in Ireland as some Imams tell them that they should not work in any job where alcohol has to be touched.

Muslims living in Ireland face a number of difficulties in relation to employment in Ireland. These problems can have wider ramifications for Muslims and for Irish society as a whole as they can act as a barrier to integration and communication. The main problem experienced was the issue of discrimination of Muslim women on the basis of wearing the *hijab* but another problem which may not be so easily overcome relates to Islamic law and the fact that Muslims in Ireland often face problems in trying to find jobs which are Sharia compliant.

## Interactions with opposite sex

One challenge that many Muslim immigrants face in Ireland is in relation to interactions with members of the opposite sex. Many Muslim women who have immigrated to Ireland have come from countries where there are strict regulations governing relationships between men and women. Although these regulations vary from country to country the basic rule is that physical contact between men and women who are not either married or related is forbidden. In Ireland, where the cultural norm is to greet by shaking hands or kissing on the cheek, this physical greeting can cause difficulties for Muslim women.

However, the prohibitions can also cause difficulties for Muslim men who may be expected to behave in ways that are not in line with their normal mode of interaction and can lead to misinterpretations, embarrassing situations and experiences. This section will take a look at some of these challenges. It begins by looking at the researcher's own experience of this interaction.

The first occasion the researcher became aware of possible challenges for Muslim immigrants living in Ireland in relation to dealing with the opposite sex was on her first visit to a building used as a mosque for Friday prayers in Waterford city. The researcher arrived early and sheltered from the rain under the eaves over the door. The man she had arranged to meet arrived a short time later. She held out her hand to shake his but he did not respond to the physical gesture and instead smiled and welcomed her. She was left holding her hand in mid air so she returned it to her pocket. As mentioned previously, there was another instance when a male participant told the researcher that he kept the door to the office open during the interview as he believed Satan is present if a man and woman sit alone together in a room.

These were the only two instances in which the researcher was aware of specific actions that were taken purely because of the fact that she was female, however, these instances are included to illustrate possible challenges Muslim men (particularly immigrants) face in Ireland in terms of dealing with women in professional and social situations. Following on from that first experience the researcher did not initiate any physical contact with male interviewees and instead waited for them to initiate contact rather than put them in a

potentially embarrassing situation. In most instances the male interviewees had no problem speaking to her alone in a room if the door was closed and most male interviewees initiated contact by shaking her hand.

None of the male interviewees spoke about this challenge and it was not included on the topic guide. However, the subject did arise in the course of a number of interviews with female participants. Akifah, a young unmarried Pakistani woman who came to Ireland to study, talked about her first visit to the university. She knocked on the door of the office of the man she was there to meet and when he opened the door he held out his hand. She shook his hand but said it was the first time in her life that she shook hands with a man so after that incident she tried to think of ways to avoid shaking hands. She explained that when she meets a man now she puts her hands behind her back and says 'hi'. She said that sometimes people understand but sometimes they do not and they say 'hi' again to her and hold out their hand so she shakes their hand and afterwards she washes her hands but she does not feel good:

I was feeling so so so so bad. I was thinking 'oh my God, I am breaking the rule of my religion, oh Allah forgive me please, that was not my fault'... If I will not shake hand the other person will be feeling embarrassed and I don't want to embarrass others. Also this is my religion, I can understand my religion, others don't understand me, don't understand my religion. So this is their culture and shaking hands is no problem. You know, in Ireland, it is no problem but that was a big problem for me.

Another woman, Afsheen from Syria who had been living in Ireland for almost twenty years, said that her niece who grew up in Ireland found the rule prohibiting relationships



between men and women very tough because all her friends had boyfriends but she is not allowed have one. Afsheen herself said that she will shake hands with a man:

I will shake hands with a man, just shake hands, but sometimes you know, for some celebrations they do give kiss on the cheek. I don't like that. So to one friend I said 'no sorry' but that embarrasses me because I don't like to embarrass my friend.

Whilst Afsheen herself is comfortable in social situations with men she said that many of her friends in the town are bewildered and frightened by the possibility of having to interact with men who are not from their immediate family. This fear is exacerbated by the fact that many of these women cannot speak English.

The rules regarding interaction between males and females also impacts upon children. In Ireland it is common for children to have 'sleepovers' in their friend's houses. Wahab said that his two daughters often had friends over to play and stay the night. However, when his daughters were invited to stay in their friend's house, Wahhab and his wife wouldn't allow it. He explained that the friend's father was very upset and annoyed about this and asked Wahab why he would not allow his daughters to stay the night. Wahab explained that he did not want his daughters sleeping over as there was a boy in the house and stressed that it was nothing against the man or his wife but that he did not want the boy to have a chance to meet his daughters in the night. The man was fine with that explanation.

The Irish Hospice Foundation have published a booklet for staff about how to care for a Muslim patient. The booklet points out a number of regulations concerning the

interaction of men and women in hospital environments including the rule that from puberty, males and females are not allowed to mix freely, that patients should be cared for by a person of the same sex and that only female workers should be present with a female patient (Caring for a Muslim Patient, 2006). The booklet was compiled with the assistance of Muslims. However, one participant in this research, himself a doctor, disagreed with these rules as well as with other rules outlined in the handbook.

The issue of interactions between men and women who are not related causes a variety of challenges for many Muslims living in Ireland. Interactions such as men and women shaking hands, kissing each other on the cheek or staying in each other's houses can cause challenges but these are easily overcome albeit at the risk of embarrassing people and causing hurt and upset. However, this too can be alleviated through greater knowledge about Islam and greater understanding.

## Apathy towards Muslims

Many participants felt that more communication and interaction was needed between non-Muslims and Muslims living in Ireland. They felt that increased knowledge and awareness amongst Irish people about Islam would lead to an amelioration of the Muslim experience in Ireland. However, one Imam said that he had strived to interact with Irish people in his neighbourhood but to no avail as they did not seem interested in getting to know him or his family.

This experience of apathy relates to a small mosque in Clonee, a Western suburb of Dublin. The Imam of the mosque explained that neighbours in the area had complained to the local authority because his house was being used for Friday prayers. He understood their concerns as numbers attending the mosque were increasing dramatically up until 2007 and he felt that maybe the neighbours were fearful of Muslims. He explained that he and other members within his community decided to invite the neighbours to a dinner in his house so he personally called to each house on the street and invited them. He said the reaction was pleasant but not enthusiastic.

Last Ramadan we invited the neighbours, those who are living in the same street to come for a dinner with us but unfortunately only one family showed up and the funny thing is they were even not Irish, they were from Hungary. They came, they were very nice and kind to accept our invitation but nobody else came and we felt really sad because we thought that because we were so open and inviting them for a dinner and welcoming them that they would definitely accept the invitation but as it showed later on, they didn't.

This indicates that, despite attempts to reach out and increase understanding, in some instances apathy exists amongst the local Irish population and there is a lack of interest in getting to know their Muslim neighbours. Clearly this is an additional barrier to interaction between Muslims and the wider Irish society.

## Peer pressure

Another potential barrier to interactions between Muslims and the wider Irish society is peer pressure. Just one participant discussed this. However, it had a huge impact on him and his family who were living in a small town in rural Ireland. The participant in question was brought up in the town at a time when they were the only Muslims living in

the area and they mixed freely with the local population. However, when other Muslim families from Pakistan started to arrive in the area things changed dramatically. He himself went to boarding school but he said it was a very tough time for his sister who lived at home:

She was allowed to grow up you know, wearing dresses and skirts and walking around the town and buying bubble gum and playing on the swings and then came a time when she wasn't allowed to do that. Why? Because people would say to my mother 'why do you let your child do this? She's a Muslim girl' and all these sorts of things.

He said he thinks his mother felt that she had to start thinking along the lines of the other Muslims. He said that he and his siblings went swimming but these newcomers had never been in a swimming pool because they had to take their clothes off. He said the changes resulted in a sense of loss and confusion and a lack of understanding about what was going on. It also resulted in a complete change in atmosphere. His house used to be visited frequently by local women having tea with his mother but when the newcomers arrived it resulted in a closing of doors and people started coming around less because they felt less welcome.

This is just one instance in which an interviewer talked about this sense of peer pressure to conform with a Muslim way of life but clearly it had a huge impact on the participant and his family. He felt that it resulted in a two way barrier between the Muslim and Irish community in the town where he lived and it was based on fear – fear of being different and fear of being ostracised.

## Conclusion

Muslims living in Ireland perceive a wide range of obstacles to their integration into Irish society and interaction with non-Muslims. The barriers identified by participants relate first of all to a sense that their religion is misunderstood by the majority of Irish people

and that part of the reason for this is the portrayal of Islam in the media. Most participants felt that media representations of Islam and of Muslims were inaccurate and for the most part related to a small minority within Islam. They felt that misconceptions and misrepresentations fuelled discrimination and prejudices and many had experienced instances of these in their lives. It was felt that some of these instances were also fuelled by violent acts carried out by Muslims in the name of Islam. Muslims living in Ireland also experienced barriers in relation to gaining employment and they felt that language barriers were particularly relevant to their experiences but also something that could be overcome through education. Other barriers identified include peer pressure and a lack of interest on the part of Irish people to get to know the truth behind the stereotypes.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

Priority must be given to achieving this opening up of minds and hearts: to be oneself not in opposition to the Other but alongside him, with him, dealing with our differences in active proximity, not in the isolated corners of our intellectual and social ghettos

(Ramadan, 2004: 110)

This chapter concludes the research by giving a concise overview and attempting a synthesis of the literature review and research findings. It starts by explaining the rationale for including aspects of the history and development of Islam in a research project of this nature. It goes on to point out reasons for suggesting that the Muslim experience in Ireland is unique in comparison to that of the rest of Europe. Before examining the key findings in relation to adaptation and integration, the chapter gives a brief summary of the unity and diversity within Islam in Ireland. It then focuses on the ways in which Muslims in Ireland have to adapt to their surroundings in terms of religious practice before concluding with an examination of perceptions of integration and of barriers to integration.

### **Key factors for consideration in the history of Islam**

The first chapter provided an introduction to the history of Islam and the beliefs and practices of Muslims and suggested that a basic understanding of these was necessary in

order to appreciate the complex religious tradition that informs the lives of Muslims living in Ireland today. Early developments such as the establishment of the *ummah* and the spread of Islam into diverse geographical and cultural areas have had enduring impacts on Muslims and on Islamic thought and continue to inform Muslim experiences across the world. Many of the diverse groups and movements that sprung up within the early Islamic community have persisted to the present time and more diversity has evolved within Islam in recent years as a result of changing political circumstances and attempts to grapple with problems that have arisen as a result of the Islamic encounter with colonialism and modernisation. The five pillars of Islam were also outlined in brief as they provide a basic framework for the practice of Islam. An understanding of these factors is necessary in order to appreciate the challenges Muslims in Ireland face in relation to religious practice. The chapter also explored the historical interactions between Islam and Europe. The research suggests that early encounters between both entities have laid the framework for meta-narratives about Islam in the West and inform current relations between Islam and the West. The chapter concluded with an examination of the history of Muslims in Ireland and outlined some of the key demographics of the Irish Muslim population.

## Unique aspects of Islam in Ireland

The development of Islam in Ireland has followed a different trajectory to that of Islam in other European countries. A primary reason for this has been the relatively recent arrival of large numbers of Muslims in Ireland. This can be illustrated by reference to the development of religious institutions. The first purpose built mosques in Ireland were

opened in the small town of Ballyhaunis in 1986 and in Clonskeagh in Dublin in 1996. This compares to Germany where the first mosque was built in 1866, France where the Paris Mosque was completed in 1926, and the United Kingdom, where the Shahjehan Mosque in Woking was completed in 1889 (Nielsen, 1992). Participants in this research also felt that Irish mosques are less likely to be affiliated with certain groups or sects compared to mosques in the United Kingdom.

The Muslim population in many European countries comes from former colonies. This compares with Ireland which was a colonised rather than colonising country. This has resulted in a shared historical heritage between Muslim immigrants and Irish people (Selim, 2005b: 28) and has also resulted in a diverse Muslim population that is not primarily linked with one specific area. The economic and social status of Muslims in Ireland appears to be higher than that of the United Kingdom (Peach cited in Flynn, 2006: 235). Participants themselves expressed the view that the Muslim population in Ireland was newer, smaller, more diverse yet more united, less extreme and more educated than Muslim populations in the UK, Holland, Germany and France.

## Diversity and unity

The findings indicate that there are numerous strands of subjective and objective levels of diversity amongst the Muslim population in Ireland. This diversity relates to factors such as nationality, reasons for immigration, impressions of life in Ireland, levels of religious belief and practice, membership of sects or groups, views on integration, views on militancy and levels of interaction with the wider non-Muslim Irish population.



Individual participants identified what they considered to be the key diversifying features of the Muslim population. Some felt that nationality was the key factor whilst others felt that it was the length of stay in Ireland, the level of education, their cultural background, their affiliation to either moderate sects or stricter schools of thought.

Against the backdrop of diversity however, there are a number of key unifying factors, not least of which is the shared belief in Allah and in the divine Quranic revelations received by Muhammad. These beliefs set the foundation for other unifying factors perhaps the primary being the unanimous sense of belonging to the worldwide Islamic community or *ummah*. This sense of unity is reinforced through religious practice and the five pillars of the faith as well as through international networks of communication amongst Muslim groups and between relatives living in different parts of the world. In many ways this sense of unity transcends diversity. This was evidenced by the fact that participants were often reluctant to link themselves with, or even acknowledge the existence of, specific schools of thought in Ireland. The almost paradoxical unity and diversity of Islam in Ireland operate in tandem with each other in a delicately poised balance. Ramadan (2004: 106) in his discussion of Muslims in the west suggests that 'intracommunal dialogue between trains of thought, as well as among national and local organisations, is virtually nonexistent. People ignore or exclude one another while at the same time they say, 'we are all brothers''.

## Adaptation for religious practices

The large number of immigrants amongst the Muslim population in Ireland coupled with the fact that Ireland has traditionally been a relatively religiously homogenous society means that Muslims living in Ireland have to adapt to their surroundings on a number of levels including socially, culturally and economically. The immigration of religious groups into such a homogenous society and the subsequent adaptation of religious practice to the new surroundings can pose challenges (Chryssides, 1994: 58).

One of the first challenges faced by Muslims arriving in Ireland is finding suitable premises to pray. To date there are just three purpose built mosques in Ireland. Most other mosques are in existing buildings that are specifically adapted for the purposes of religious practice. Many of these are makeshift houses or warehouses that are rented out by the local Muslim community, a smaller number are in premises that have been bought and converted for religious practice whilst some religious ceremonies and celebrations are held in community halls or even in institutions where a large number of Muslims work.

The difficulties relating to places of prayer include finding suitable premises with washing facilities, obtaining a site, purchasing land, obtaining planning permission, securing existing premises for rent for religious purposes and ensuring there are sufficient parking spaces. The small number of mosques in Ireland means that those living in more isolated or rural areas often have to travel long distances to get to their nearest mosque.

Muslims also face difficulties in finding a suitable place for daily prayers in their places of work or education and getting time off work to facilitate prayer. However, many felt that both of these issues were easily overcome by carrying prayer mats and praying in any quiet, clean place that could be found. Participants generally found employers amenable to giving time off for prayer although a few said they knew of people too shy to make such requests. Muslims in Ireland adapt to the lack of a public call to prayer by purchasing radio or alarm clocks systems which broadcast the *adhan* in private places. Timetables detailing the changing prayer times have been published and distributed to Muslim families throughout Ireland.

Another challenge is faced in relation to getting time off work for major Islamic festivals although again many said they adapted to this by holding fuller celebrations at the nearest weekend and going to the mosque for prayer before work. Fasting during Ramadan when it falls during the summer months in Ireland can also prove to be a challenging experience as the time between sunrise and sunset is very lengthy when compared with countries in more southerly latitudes.

A number of Muslim communities adapt to the lack of Sharia law at government level by implementing it within their own community, particular in relation to family matters. In relation to *halal* food, Muslims in Ireland often feel they have to be aware when eating in non-Muslim households or restaurants as *haram* products may unwittingly be included on the menu. However, there are a growing number of *halal* shops around Ireland as well as institutions and workplaces where *halal* food is served. The prohibition on alcohol causes

challenges in terms of the many jobs which require the handling of alcoholic products or business such as restaurants which require the sale of alcohol in order to operate successfully. Some adapt to the prohibition on financial interest by placing money in bank accounts that do not earn interest or by giving money earned through interest to charitable institutions, others reinterpret the prohibition in light of living in Ireland and will take out mortgages from financial institutions on the understanding that this is acceptable where there is no housing alternative.

Muslims in Ireland also have to adapt to the shortage of burial places specifically allocated for Muslims. Whilst there is a space for Muslims in the Newcastle cemetery in Dublin this often requires long journeys for those living in more remote parts of Ireland and the space at the cemetery is at a minimum. Finally, Muslim families who are concerned to ensure their children receive an Islamic education adapt to the lack of Muslim schools by sending children for religious education to their local mosque in the evenings. They will also often monitor religious lessons in the school the child is attending and sometimes will request that their child be excused from class during religious lessons.

## Integration

Integration is a slippery term that is often interpreted in different ways by different people. Indeed participants themselves viewed the process in a variety of ways. This research focused specifically on social integration which relates to friendships and involvement with non-Muslim groups and societies. Any of the research participants who

spoke about integration viewed it as a positive and important process for Muslims living in Ireland. Most interpreted it as a process that involved a symbiotic relationship involving mutual understanding as well as giving and taking between both the immigrant and the host society. A number of participants felt strongly that there is a propensity amongst Irish people to see integration as a process that involves abandoning ones own culture and norms in favour of that of the host society and some participants felt that the upholding of religious prohibitions on alcohol or of wearing a headscarf are often viewed wrongly as an unwillingness to integrate. Many felt that an inability to speak English was a major factor that prohibited integration and led to isolation.

Research conducted to date on the experiences of Muslims living in Ireland has pointed to a lack of effort from both Irish society and the Muslim community regarding integration (McPhee, 2005: 63 and Flynn, 2006: 235). This research supports those findings whilst at the same time it suggests that levels of integration amongst the Muslim population in Ireland are as fragmented and diverse as the Muslim population itself. Participants themselves recognised this diversity and felt that, whilst many Muslims were integrating, there were also those who were becoming more isolated in Irish society.

All participants who had lived in Ireland for over twenty years had many friendships with non-Muslim Irish and often belonged to or participated in non-Muslim organisations and groups. More recent arrivals in Ireland often had either a small number, or no non-Muslim Irish friends. This, however, does not necessarily point to a similar pattern in the future as there are many potential factors that may have contributed to the greater

integration of the older or more established Muslim community including the fact that the Muslim community in Ireland up to the 1980s was relatively small and the possibility that Islam was given less negative media coverage prior to 2000 thus generating less mutual distrust or suspicion.

Participants also felt that Muslim women were more prone to isolation than Muslim men. They felt there were a number of reasons for this including the fact that many were stay-at-home mothers or that they could not speak English. Participants also felt that Muslim women were more prone to incidents of Islamophobia by virtue of the often visible nature of their religion due to their dress. This too could act as a deterrent to integration.

The primary social sphere for almost all participants was with fellow Muslims of the same background or nationality. There were a small number of participants who said they had more non-Muslim than Muslim friends. However, these were participants who described themselves as non-practicing Muslims. Findings support Flynn's (2006: 235) suggestion that although 'young Muslims work and study alongside their Irish compatriots harmoniously and productively, they socialise with Muslim peers and with their families'.

Participants expressed concerns about the consequences of a failure to integrate with the wider non-Muslim Irish society. Some felt it was impacting negatively on relationships within the family unit where language barriers were causing problems of communication

between generations, others felt it could lead to isolation and could create a potential breeding ground for distrust, misunderstandings and militant behaviour.

According to the European Union's twelve Common Basic Principles for integration, integration is a dynamic two-way process involving immigrants and members of the host society (Commission of the European Communities, 2005). Integration will not, therefore, work if both sides are not committed to the process (Legrain, 2005: 257) and integration can be blocked by either the immigrants or by the receiving society (Heckman, 2005: 19).

Ireland's lack of a national policy on integration has been pinpointed in the past as one factor that inhibits integration (see Moran 2005 and Boucher 2008). Another factor which has been cited as having the potential to contribute to social fragmentation rather than integration are the admission policies of primary schools which permit schools to discriminate on the basis of religion when awarding places. Because the vast majority of primary schools in Ireland are run by the Catholic Church, this could have implications for Muslim families and for wider social patterns and has led to some predict that it could lead to ghettoisation, 'white flight' and the segregation of communities along religious lines (see McGorman and Sugrue, 2007: xiv).

## The media, grand narratives and culture

A perception expressed by every participant was that the media tend to portray Islam and Muslims unfairly in a negative light and that this perpetuates barriers of misunderstanding and fear and is a prohibitive factor in relation to integration.

Events linked to the Muslim world that have had global significance have resulted in global discourses that pit Islam against the West and this has the potential to affect local relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe (Mitri, 2007). The coverage of these events therefore plays an important role in informing Western perceptions of Islam and Muslims and can lead to discrimination and suspicion (Ramadan, 2004: 71).

The meta-narrative of Islam as enemy has roots in historical encounters between Islam and Europe but is also informed by 'Orientalist' discourse where the Orient is linked with Islam and which distinguishes between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority (Said, 2003). It contributes to the controversial but persuasive argument by Huntington (1997) that suggests there is a 'Clash of Civilisations' between the West and Islam. This in turn can lead to justifications for Islamophobia which has the potential to result in the isolation of the Muslim population by inhibiting integration. Indeed almost all participants of this research had experienced some element of Islamophobia during their time in Ireland. These incidents ranged from a sense of being singled out or stared at, to verbal and even physical abuse.



Participants felt that Islamophobia was linked with misperceptions about Islam as a religion of violence and that this was fuelled by its portrayal in the media. Some felt that the media gave a voice to extremist Muslims whilst the vast majority of peaceful Muslims are voiceless and underrepresented. Participants, however, acknowledged that militancy within Islam was impacting on their local relationships in Ireland as it was this that ultimately led to negative portrayals of Islam in the media. One man described it by saying that whilst people are dying physically as a result of atrocities carried out by Muslims, that he is dying everyday because he suffers the effects of these acts.

Other challenges relating to the interaction of Muslims with non-Muslims in Ireland include language barriers which can prohibit exchanges at a variety of levels including in shops and health institutions. Participants felt that the social hub of the pub in Irish life also creates challenges for interaction as alcohol is prohibited in Islam and socialising in pubs is often frowned upon by their peers or they themselves feel that going to a pub would go against their religion. The lack of knowledge about *halal* and *haram* food amongst Irish people also results in a reluctance on the part of some Muslims to socialise in non-Muslim homes.

Whilst participants felt that Muslim women often faced more instances of discrimination than men, some participants felt that the *burkha* inhibited interactions with non-Muslims. Participants also felt that Muslim women were more likely to be discriminated against in the area of employment, again because of the visibility of their religion and their wearing of the *hijab*. Other challenges relating to employment concerned jobs that were not

considered to be Sharia compliant; for example, working in a financial institution where interest was charged, working in jobs where alcohol was served or working in the caring professions where Muslims may have to deal with members of the opposite sex. Indeed, interactions with members of the opposite sex sometimes threw up challenges for Muslim immigrants who were from societies where these types of interactions were limited.

Whilst this was not perceived to result in a barrier to integration, it did pose significant challenges. As integration is a two-way process, the lack of interest and apathy on the part of non-Muslims can also act as a barrier to interaction as can the reluctance on the part of Muslims to interact with non-Muslims in the community.

## Conclusion

The relatively recent presence of large numbers of Muslims in Ireland means that to date, very limited research has been carried out on their experiences. It is hoped that this research has shed some light on the challenges that Muslims living in Ireland face in their daily lives both in relation to the practice of their religion and their integration with the wider non-Muslim society.

The main research question which developed throughout the research has been framed by questions relating to the history, diversity, experiences and practices of Muslims in Ireland and the main research question has been addressed:

- What challenges do Muslims in Ireland face in relation to the practice of their religion and their integration with the wider Irish society?

Most of the challenges relating to religious practice are surmountable and can be tackled from within the Muslim population. However, challenges to integration require a concerted effort on the part of both Muslims and the wider Irish society in order for them to be overcome. Participants felt that the key factor inhibiting integration was a lack of knowledge about Islam and about Muslims amongst the Irish population. They felt that this lack of knowledge coupled with a lack of personal experience of Muslims fuelled fears about Islam and that these fears were exacerbated by the misrepresentation of Muslims in the media. Some participants felt that the involvement of a minority of Muslims in militant activities also contributed to the growing prevalence of misunderstandings about Islam. A number of participants also expressed fears about western societies and cultural mores as well as what some perceived as a decline in moral values. When these factors are combined with challenges such as cultural differences and religious prohibitions that are often at odds with the social or cultural practices of mainstream Irish society, it is clear that Muslims living in Ireland face significant challenges in relation to their integration with Irish society. In order for integration to take place, steps must be taken on both sides primarily to facilitate greater understanding and knowledge of the other. As Ramadan (2004: 203) points out 'knowing the other is a process that is unavoidable if fear of difference is to be overcome and mutual respect is to be attained'.

There is an onus therefore on both Irish society and on Muslims living in Ireland to work together to facilitate integration from both directions. Participants felt that Irish people needed more information about Islam and that Muslim people needed more information

about Ireland and about Irish people. They felt that this knowledge had to come from sources other than the media as Irish people tended to associate Islam with the acts of a minority of Muslim terrorists and needed to be able to differentiate between the religion and the people. They felt that this two-way stream of knowledge and information between Muslims and Irish society would contribute to a better relationship, more understanding and higher levels of integration and that this would be a positive framework in which the Muslim community could develop in Ireland.

Finally, this research is by no means an exhaustive outline of the Muslim population of Ireland or of their experiences. Indeed, the research has opened up many further research questions that need to be explored. These include questions relating to mosques and their affiliation with various schools of thought, questions relating to the isolation of Muslim women in Ireland and questions relating to Muslim children in Ireland as a generation that may well be bridging a cultural divide.

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## Glossary

*adhan* – the call to prayer

*ahadith* – plural of *hadith*

*Admadiyya* - a Muslim sect founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (see Appendix E)

*Barelwis* – a 19<sup>th</sup> century movement founded by Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi (see Appendix E)

*burkha* – an outer garment worn by women which covers the entire body

*Deobandi* – a 19<sup>th</sup> century movement founded in India (see Appendix E)

*hadith* – report of the Prophet Muhammad’s sayings and actions

*halal* – permitted or lawful

*haram* – prohibited or unlawful

*hijab* – veil or head covering worn by Muslim women in public

*hijra* – emigration

*Imam* – leader or prayer leader. In Shiah Islam it refers to a successor of the Prophet Muhammad who is a descendent of Ali and who governs as the head of the Islamic community

*jihad* – struggle to practice Islam, either internally or externally. It can include armed struggle and holy war

*kaba* – cube shaped shrine in the centre of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the focal point for prayer and pilgrimage

*nikab* – another word for the burkha

**Salafi/Salafiyya** – Salafiyya means ‘pious ancestors’. It is also an Islamic movement (see Appendix E)

**shalwar kameez** – traditional dress worn by men and women in South Asia made up of a long shirt and loose trousers

**Sharia** – Islamic law

**surah** – a chapter of the Quran

**sunnah** – practice or behaviour of the Prophet Muhammad

**Tablighi Jamaat** – a 20<sup>th</sup> century movement (see Appendix E)

**ummah** – the worldwide Islamic community

**urf** – the custom of a society

**Wahhabi** – an eighteenth century revivalist movement (see Appendix E)

## **APPENDIX A: INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE RESEARCH**

This project is being undertaken by Colette Colfer as part of a research masters degree at Waterford Institute of Technology.

The aim of the research is to explore the relationship between Muslims living in Ireland and Irish society and to document the history, practices, beliefs and experiences of Muslims in Ireland from a Muslim point of view.

The research will be centred around a series of in-depth interviews with male and female Muslims from a range of social and cultural backgrounds who are now living in Ireland.

It is hoped that the research will contribute to a greater understanding in Ireland of the religion of Islam and to a wider appreciation of the growing multiculturalism and diversity of Irish society.

The outcomes of the research are likely to include a published account of the findings as well as public discussions and debates.

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM - RADIO INTERVIEWS

I \_\_\_\_\_ give permission for the interview(s) conducted with me for the radio series 'Islam in Ireland' to be used in the research project 'Islam in Ireland – Assimilation and Adaptation'.

I understand that the purpose of the research project is a master's degree being undertaken by Colette Colfer at Waterford Institute of Technology and that the information may be published in books and articles, and may be discussed in public presentations or broadcasts.

I understand that my name will never appear as having taken part in this research unless I grant permission by ticking the appropriate box below:

Please tick one of the following:

I grant permission for my name to be included in all printed, published and broadcast outcomes of the research	
I do not grant permission for my name to be included in any printed, published or broadcast outcomes of the research	

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time and that participation is entirely voluntary.

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witnessed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM**

I .....agree to take part in the research project ‘Islam in Ireland - Assimilation and Adaptation’. I understand what the research is about, why it is being conducted and what the information will be used for. Colette Colfer has fully explained to me the aims and purpose of the research.

I consent to taking part in a research interview and for this interview to be taped. It has been explained to me the reasons for taping the interview and that these tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to Colette Colfer and her academic supervisor, Dr. Michael Howlett, and that they will be destroyed upon completion of the research. I also understand that my name will never appear as having taken part in this research unless I grant permission by ticking the box below:

I grant permission for my name to be included in all printed, published and broadcast outcomes of the research	
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I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time and that participation is entirely voluntary.

Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witnessed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX D: TOPIC GUIDE**

### **OBJECTIVES**

Firstly of all I want to thank you for taking part in this research project and I want to stress that you will be completely anonymous and your name won't be included anywhere on the research and there will be no records of the interview kept with your name on them.

The purpose of the research is to describe the experiences of Muslims living in Ireland. Also to find out the historical background of Islam in Ireland

Just also to explain that the interview will be recorded on mini-disc and it will be recording up until the point where we are parting company.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Introduce the study; confidentiality; timing

#### **1. PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES**

- Age
- Location
- Family circumstances
- Career – work/education
- Spare time

#### **2. LIFE HISTORY**

Encourage detailed coverage of circumstances and key events/periods

- Childhood and family background
  - where born
  - family composition
  - family circumstances (economic, mobility)
  - extended family (geographic and emotional proximity)
  
- School life/education
  - where went to school
  - When left school/further education
  - Any qualifications
  
- Working history
  - whether worked, when started
  - types of jobs

- Leaving home
  - when, what precipitated
  - experiences and feelings
  - how well prepared
  
- Home moving/stability
  - experiences of moving
  - where from/to
  - what precipitated
  - first impressions of new place/country

### **3. RELIGION**

#### \* Religion in current circumstances

- **sect**
- mosque
- prayers

#### \* Religion in the past

- family and religion
- first memory of religion
- significant religious events
- awareness of diversity within Islam
- experiences of diversity or of us and them
- interactions with other groups/religions

#### \* Religion in Ireland

- Overall view of religion in Ireland
- View of Islam in Ireland & Islamic community
- Diversity in Ireland
- Experiences of diversity
  - interactions with other sects or groups
- experiences of interactions with non-Muslims
- social life in Ireland
- involvement in any clubs, organisations, groups

#### ● Friendships

- important friendships and relationship as growing up
- whether local network of friends, what based around and how easily made
- whether still in contact, still important
- religion of friends
- religious experiences with friends
- interaction with Irish people

- Irish behaviour and attitude towards you
  
- Further relationships
  - boyfriends/girlfriends/partners
  - living together
  - relationship breakdowns/separations
  - religion and relationships – shared religions or religious experiences
  
- \* Difficulties
  - What are the difficulties
  - How cope with difficulties
  - mosque
  - prayers
  - Sharia law
  - education
  - discrimination interaction, socialising
  
- world-wide community
  - experience of links with Muslims from around the world
  - identification with Muslims from around the world
  - identification with Muslims from other sects or groups or countries
  - identification with Irish people

### **3. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

- Islam in Ireland
  - to overcome difficulties
  - most important issues
  - solutions to problems
  - what way would like to see it developing
  - what could be done to help Muslims coming to Ireland for the first time
  - what can be learned from experience
  - what would have made a difference at times when there were difficulties

## APPENDIX E: DIVISIONS IN ISLAM

**Ahmadiyya** – founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839-1908). This group have been the subject of much hostility from other Muslim groups who usually dismiss their claim to be Muslims (Wolffe, 1993: 140-141). Its founder believed himself to be the mahdi or expected one who would regenerate Islam. It is a proselytizing movement and has been persecuted in Pakistan so its headquarters are now in Britain. It is further divided into **Qadianis** and **Lahoris**.

**Ahl-i-Hadith** movement condemned Sufism and advocated a return to the Quran and *ahadith* in a very strict fashion. Their aim is to purify the faith and get rid of accretions and superstitions. They live a puritanical style of life and try to return to the original Islam (Wolffe, 1993: 139-140). Generally ‘more sophisticated urban Muslims’ than the Barelwis (Metcalf in Wolffe, 1993: 140).

**Ahl-i-Quran** movement (also known as **Pervaizi movement**) split up from the Ahl-i-Hadith movement in the late nineteenth century. They believe that the Quran is the only authentic source of authority (Wolffe, 1993: 139).

**Barelwis** – named after their founding figure Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi (1856-1921) who stressed Sufi devotion, the veneration of saints and the endorsement of other customs (Robinson in Wolffe, 1993: 140). There is also a stress on the celebration of *mawlid*, the anniversary of either the death or birth of the prophet. This is often criticised

by other groups who see the practice as a divinisation of Muhammad (Wolffe, 1993: 154). They also saw the non-Islamic state as irrelevant (Wolffe, 1993: 140). According to Wolffe (1993: 140) they are generally poorly educated rural people.

**Deobandi** – named after a madrasa founded in 1867 in Deoband, India. They have ‘sought to promote a revival of Islamic observance, spirituality and culture while accepting that they would not be assisted by the state, let alone able to control it’ (Wolffe, 1993: 139). They have also synthesised some aspects of Sufi practices as well as a stress on study and the observance of the Sharia and try to restore the classical mediaeval form of Islam (Wolffe, 1993: 140). Generally they are considered to be ‘more sophisticated urban Muslims’ than the Barelwis (Metcalf in Wolffe, 1993: 140).

**Ismaili** – a subdivision within Shii Islam which emerged after a dispute over the leadership. The Aga Khan is the leader of the most important subsection and in Britain the community often came from India via East Africa and is often wealthy and highly involved in the business world (Wolffe, 1993: 138).

**Jamaat-i-Islami** – founded in 1941 by Abul Ala Maududi. Promoted Islam as a total way of life and wanted to create an Islamic state. They are a political force in Pakistan since 1947 and resist secularisation. They have ‘a potentially radical programme which would tend to have a natural appeal to a community in a state of insecurity and transition’ (Wolffe, 1993: 142). Encourages ‘the separation of male and female domains on the grounds of the potentially disruptive effect of sexual temptation’ (Wolffe, 1993: 159).

**Salafi/Salafiyya** – Salafiyya means ‘pious ancestors’ and refers to the founding fathers of the Muslim community (Esposito, 2005: 13). The movement known as Salafiyya today is linked with Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and Rashid Rida (1865-1935) who both called for a reinterpretation of Islam and the development of a modern Islamic legal system.

**Tablighi Jamaat** – developed in the 1920s and evolved from the Deobandi tradition. They rejected Sufi tendencies and focused on the spiritual renewal of the faith and on missionary behaviour. They are often identifiable by their dress – a cap, beard and long shirt (Wolffe, 1993: 141).

**Wahhabi** – the movement was an eighteenth century revivalist movement that often provides the example for modern revivalism. It was founded by Muhammad ibn al-Wahhab (1703-92) who was drawn to the Hanbali law school which is seen as the strictest of the Sunni law schools. He denounced popular practices such as the veneration of saints and tombs and believed the decline of the Islamic community and political weakness was because of a deviation from the straight path of Islam. He wanted a return to life based on the Quran, the examples of the Prophet Muhammad and the Medinan community and wanted a social and moral revolution (Esposito, 2005: 118-119).