

Discuss the impact of Islam during the past forty years in the United Kingdom.

The development of the Islam and Muslim communities in the UK can be seen from the early nineteenth century with more Muslims men travelling to the UK for work¹ and bringing their families later on. Though they began to appear centuries prior to that, post-war immigration meant that Muslim Communities were becoming more apparent after the Second World War with more Muslims and British people living along side each other within their communities². By today, many Muslims have settled and raised families in the UK. After Christianity Islam is the second fastest growing religion in the world. In some areas there are also more Muslims than there are Christians. With these figures in mind we can see that there has definitely been an impact from Islam in the last four decades. Whilst this topic could be studied from a political, economical, cultural or historical aspect alone, this paper will use examples to provide a general overview the impact of Islam during the past forty years in the UK. It is important to note that not all aspects can be discussed.

The first impact to discuss from Islam during the past forty years in the UK is the impact it has had on research. With more Muslims coming to the UK the interest in their culture, religious belief, backgrounds and migration patterns have all become subjects of great interest to researchers across the country. Over the years there have been a variety of studies which have focussed on different aspects of Islam and how this has impacted the UK. This in itself is an interesting impact on the country as it has seen a totally new field of research develop. In an article for The Oxford Handbook of European Islam researchers Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Jocelyn Cerasi mention a new area of research which could be referred to today as 'British Muslim Studies'. This attracts a varying range of researchers from historians, lawyers, geographers, anthropologists and more³. This is an exciting impact as it offers different perspectives to an evolving area.

Following the impacts on research, the second category of impact to discuss is the religious impact. Muslims and British people have lived alongside each other for quite some time by now. After Christianity, Islam is the second biggest religion in the UK. Though this has no direct impact of the day to day life of Muslims or non-Muslims in the UK, it is important to keep in mind the size of both religions in order to understand the links between this and other impacts. Though with different views on religion and even secular matter they have co-existed mostly successfully in joint yet separate communities. As more Muslims have come to the UK one cultural impact is the addition of more Mosques being built. Numbers of Mosques in the UK have grown for example in 1945 only one Mosque stood in England⁴, by today there are over across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Other religious impacts may not be as obvious to see as the United Kingdom is home to followers of many different religions, however there are more things to accommodate this diversity such as prayer rooms in some public areas and faiths schools.

As well as a religious impact, Islam and Muslims in the UK have contributed to cultural impacts in the UK. It is believed that Yemeni Muslims settled in South Shields and then similar communities developed near the docks of Cardiff and Liverpool. The main surge in Muslims coming to the UK was seen after the post-war

¹ Tahir Abbas, *Muslim Britain* (London: Zed Books, 2013).

² Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims In Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), pp. 1-37.

³ Jocelyne Cesari and Sophie Gilliat-Ray, "The United Kingdom", *The Oxford Handbook Of European Islam*, 2014 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199607976.013.4>>.

⁴ Ibid.

immigration⁵. This resulted in the developments of more diverse micro-Muslim communities in the UK⁶. Though it is not an impact that is obvious in the day to day lives of people in Britain, the development of these additional multicultural diversities did have a cultural impact on the communities in which they lived. The controversy relating to the Muslims communities in Britain didn't come apparent until the 1980s and 1990s when tensions began to grow⁷. By this stage there was ever emerging information on the political importance of Islam to the UK. In addition to this, in the last forty years or so we have seen the socio-economic impact of Muslims in the UK. The 2001 census⁸ shows overall that Muslims on the whole were seen to be of lower social status than others. It is important to note that this data counts for women and men in England and in Wales as opposed to referring to the UK as a whole. With more women within Muslim communities working and more communities being established it would be interesting to revisit this point with data from the census of 2021 when it becomes available.

The status of Muslims in our communities and the growing tensions from the media could be to blame for the hostility which has been shown towards Muslims in the United Kingdom. In short terms, Islamophobia is defined as a type of racism by the APPG⁹ which is aimed specifically towards Muslims. Another sad impact we have seen in the last 40 years is the increase of Islamophobia in the United Kingdom. The Muslim Council of Britain has reported that by 2018 hate crime has risen by 40% in England and Wales with 52% directed at Muslims¹⁰. Though the reasons behind this increase in hate crimes is deeply rooted and complicated it is clear it has a very negative impact on the United Kingdom and more needs to be done to ensure better education and understanding of Islam which would help support and protect the Muslims in the UK which is still being campaigned for by The Muslim Council of Britain.

The third impact to discuss is the political impact Islam has had on the UK. Prior to the 1940s study of Muslims in the UK was based more on their history, and how they came to begin life in the UK. In more recent time we have seen a surge in research in 'British Muslims'¹¹. As stated previously, by now there are many Muslims who have been born and raised in the United Kingdom. The last forty years alone will have allowed for at least two generations of families to place roots all over the UK. As a result of this, there are more calls for Islam to be involved within the political workings of the country, however this appears to be slower in development. Research by Dilwar Hussain¹² from the Islamic Foundation has shown that Muslims are participating more in politics for example through joining existing parties, creating new Muslim parties or more recently through working on government projects such as PREVENT to name a few. However despite this it is clear to see that Muslim representation in government is slow in catching up with the

⁵ Abbas, *Muslim Britain*, 2013.

⁶ Oliver Scharbrodt, "A Minority Within A Minority?: The Complexity And Multilocality Of Transnational Twelver Shia Networks In Britain", *Cross Mark*, 2018 <https://link.springer.com/epdf/10.1007/s11562-018-0431-0?shared_access_token=xc83VhcP5LKlZr2NfIXi9_e4RwlQNchNBiy7wbcMAY5yo_JLAJ6lt6vUQgLSIx3l0r4ZaNIduGVwtBsITxpp4vzAPXn_O6nrllb6lwTzaJ8l96p4ApFQWuElzvLPCiR9VFJval2XWmG3ytDNjDX2YvOGX2AtatSqoYRgA-lz7B8%3D> [Accessed 8 January 2021].

⁷ Abbas, *Muslim Britain*, 2013.

⁸ "2001 Census And Earlier - Office For National Statistics", *ONS.gov.Uk*, 2021 <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2001censusandearlier>> [Accessed 8 January 2021].

⁹ "APPG On British Muslims", *APPG On British Muslims*, 2021 <<https://appgbritishmuslims.org>> [Accessed 8 January 2021].

¹⁰ "Projects - Muslim Council Of Britain (MCB)", *Muslim Council Of Britain (MCB)*, 2018 <<https://mcb.org.uk/projects/>> [Accessed 8 January 2021].

¹¹ Cesari and Gilliat-Ray, "The United Kingdom", 2014.

¹² Serena Hussain, "An Annotated Bibliography Of Recent Literature On 'Invisible' Muslim Communities And New Muslim Migrant Communities In Britain", *Compas.Ox*, 2015 <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/RR-2008-Muslims_Cohesion_Bibliography.pdf> [Accessed 8 January 2021].

majority of Muslims in the United Kingdom. A key figure to cite in this discussion is Sayeeda Warsi¹³ who is best known for being the first Muslim to serve in a British cabinet. Though Sayeeda Warsi's time on the cabinet was cut short when she resigned in 2014, she made history as the first Muslim to serve in a British cabinet and her work clearly impacted on the politics of the years she was a member.

Therefore to conclude, though not all impacts could be discussed this brief overview has shown that it is clear to see that Islam has had an impact on various aspects of life in the United Kingdom. Though there is still room for Muslims and Islam to grow in the UK with better representation politically needed, it is interesting to see how the relationships between the UK and Islam have developed. With more Muslims again likely to become part of our communities it will be interesting to revisit this field and see what other research which will be conducted over the next forty or so years.

¹³ Sayeeda Warsi, "About", *The Baroness Warsi*, 2021 <<https://sayeedawarsi.com/about/>> [Accessed 8 January 2021].

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