

Hate crimes in the UK against Ex-Muslims

Experiences, Effects and Recommendations

‘There are all sorts of rights these days but it is a disappointment that there is no right to protect Muslim converts to Christianity in a Christian country like the United Kingdom with such liberal/democratic values and Human Rights.’

Iranian convert to Christianity (Anonymous at own request)

Typically those who leave Islam face a stark choice – keep quiet about their decision, or face discrimination, hatred and violence. We explore the issues of how many ‘apostates’ there may be, the little available literature, and record the varied experiences of both covert and overt ‘apostates’, chiefly humanists / agnostics / atheists and Christians, as well as, in some cases, their calls for the state to do more to protect them. We conclude with some recommendations for tackling what appears to be a widespread and deeply entrenched problem. Contents : Introduction p2, Interview summaries p7, Discussion, recommendations and areas for further research p10, Summary p13

Introduction

Strong anecdotal evidence from numerous sources suggests that there is a rapidly growing population of former Muslims (often referred to as 'apostates') in the UK, as in most other Western nations, and that such ex-Muslims tend to face extremely high levels of harassment, up to and including violence and murder, precisely because of their status as ex-Muslims – in other words, they are a target for hate crime. Most commonly, such 'apostates' convert to Christianity or to forms of humanism/atheism. A number of organisations, particularly Christian charities, operate safe houses for people facing forced marriage and 'honour' crime, and a good proportion of these are 'apostates'. Due to security issues, we have naturally not been able to get into contact with those whose situation has been so dire that they have been forced to turn to such safe houses. We have, however, talked to several who have been forced to move house or city, or anticipate having to do so in the near future.

Despite this strong anecdotal evidence, including multiple media reports in both mainstream and specialist media, it is hard to find definitive answers to questions such as 'how many ex-Muslims are there?' There is next to no academic literature on the subject, and estimates of numbers can vary widely, and there are significant difficulties in attempting to answer that question. For instance it is well known that significant numbers of asylum seekers are turning to Christianity, but their numbers are difficult to assess, as they may leave for other nations, or disappear into the 'black' economy to avoid deportation after failed claims. There are consistent reports of severe persecution of Christians in general, and converts in particular, in the refugee camps and asylum system in a number of continental nations such as Sweden, Germany and Greece, among others, as documented by such groups as the Barnabas Fund and the International Christian Consulate (ICC). Such persecution involves targeted violence, ostracism, sexual assault, discrimination and the like. It is hard to believe that such widespread patterns are not replicated to some degree within the UK, and indeed there are some reports consistent with this.

The only academic materials we have thus far been able to find are as follows:

- a) A book entitled 'The Apostates : When Muslims leave Islam' by Simon Cottee, senior lecturer in Criminology at Kent University. The book contains the accounts of many UK and Canadian 'apostates', and also exposes the way some of the academic and cultural elite deride these vulnerable individuals as a kind of traitor.
- b) Religious Freedom is the central theme of the other work, a Masters Thesis by Anniesa Hussein, herself from a family of badly persecuted family of 'apostates': 'Challenging whether Freedom of Religion exists in the United Kingdom, with regards to the rise in persecution of Apostates from Islam.' This work contrasts the situation for 'apostates' against established International covenants and similar provisions regarding religious freedom, and looks at the interplay of multiculturalism and Islamic communal self-understanding and expression, particularly in the way it seeks to set up a parallel alternative society system. It also delves into the Islamic religious textual justification for hostility to apostates and recounts the history of several apostates as illustration.

We should note that some people were afraid to talk, or would only talk a little under conditions of strict anonymity. In at least one case we were told by other converts that a person we interviewed had had a lot more harassment and persecution than they had let on, but was very wary of talking

about it. There is concern that they might be identified by specifics, even though we anonymized most accounts, and tried to be as non-specific as we could be as to location, etc. It should be noted that the testimony of many non-convert Asian Christians in the UK closely tracks with that of apostates, including violence in schools (for refusing to convert to Islam in at least one case) and on the streets, intimidation and enforcement of Islamic norms (eg demanding no eating on the street in Ramadan, or women to cover their heads). We strongly suspect that these stories are not aberrations but part of a widespread pattern of hate crime, much of it underreported because many victims will not bother going to the police, as they believe, rightly or wrongly, that they will not be taken that seriously – a position for which sometimes they have personal experience, or point to the experience of others they know who have been unsatisfied with the results.

Many apostates remain fearful for their lives, and cautious in the extreme. Both Christian and secular ex-Muslim groups carefully vet potential new members because they report facing efforts by radical Muslims to infiltrate them. At least some are reportedly organized on a cell level, so that even if one house or cell is infiltrated, those involved have no knowledge of others.¹ They also operate vetting, and, reportedly, strict rules against maintaining any contact with their old social situation, because of two inter-related factors – one of the biggest challenges faced by apostates is the loss of family and social life and the effects of intense loneliness, depression and guilt, suddenly moving from the plus to the negative side of the honour-shame culture. The second is that there have been a number of cases where tangential connections that were kept to seemingly more sympathetic family members were used to lure ‘renegade’ family members back in for forced marriages or violence and even ‘honour’ killings by telling tales of desires for reconciliation or parents being very ill (again, no-one can really pin down figures, but there is general agreement that a significant number of honour killings, particularly of women, are in whole or in part because they have left the Islamic faith). BPCA researchers have also been told by someone involved that as a matter of policy, anyone involved in sheltering apostates should not let their location be known to police, as people with security connections have told them that likely every police force has been infiltrated, and it just takes one person with access to the force database to compromise their location, and also that at least one police force apparently has something of an unwritten policy of actively telling Muslim families the location of (non-underage) family members when they know it.

Additionally, such sources report that there appears to be a kind of cell-network of individuals who are tasked with tracking down people of interest to the community, because they are deemed to be behaving in an un-Islamic manner in some way. It is not uncommon, this source said, that when social services move a child or vulnerable person from their Muslim home to somewhere a considerable distance away, that within a few days Asian men will be on the street where the person has been placed, asking after them. A BPCA researcher has had an experienced social worker independently confirm to them that this is indeed often the case. Apostates (in this case converts to Christianity) who have been able or willing to talk have told BPCA researchers that many converts operate in the shadows, moving every couple of months.

¹ Much of the content of the following paragraphs comes from a source long known to one of the researchers and who in the past has been involved in the vetting for safe houses, and also has some sort of contact with people in the security and intelligence world.

The Council of Ex Muslims of Britain say they offer help to about 350 apostates a year who approach them – these are likely to be mostly atheists / agnostics / humanists². One Islamic researcher estimates that that of the approximately 10,000 who convert to Islam each year (mainly women) at least 5,000 will have left the faith within a few years³ – and this doesn't include those who were born Muslim but leave the faith. By this reckoning, numbers of 'apostates' of various forms and persuasions number at least in the high 10's of 1000's, and probably significantly higher.

It is also the case that a good number of what are in effect 'apostates' live quietly within Muslim communities, not participating in religious practices, or doing so to disguise their lack of belief when they must, primarily because they are fully aware that there is a often huge difference in attitude in many communities to openly declared 'apostates', as compared to merely 'bad' Muslims who don't really practice the faith much.

Whilst we cannot give any better idea of numbers, for all the above reasons, the testimony of these 'apostates', whether converts to Christianity, humanism, atheism or other religions show significant common patterns. Their experiences should be read in the light of surveys that have shown that nearly 1/4 of all UK Muslims either strongly support or tend to support the introduction of Sharia law in the UK, as do well over a third of younger Muslims (16-24 year olds, although this data is about 10 years old).⁴ All, or almost all, schools of Sharia law require apostates to be put to death.⁵

Even those who report that their immediate family was relatively accepting say that their families were emphatic about hiding their new status from the wider family and community for fear both of the shame, and potential ostracism and detrimental effects to siblings and the like, but also because of fear of violence. However, very often it is the immediate family who react violently and vehemently – ranging from extreme verbal shaming, death threats or saying 'You are dead to us' or 'It would be better if you had died', pressure based about the dishonour to the family name, guilt-tripping over adverse affects to parents health, attempts to control by seizing mobile phones or passports, beatings, keeping them locked up, knives to the throat, evicting them from the house. The same often applies to extended family, and also to friends – friends who realize that the apostasy is real and not a joke are often reported to start abusing, cursing and threatening such apostates.

All of this does not take into account harassment and attacks by radical extremists, which can also happen. Some apostates, particularly those who have spoken out, report getting well over 100 death threats.

Anecdotally, many converts report little understanding about their situation from the authorities, and many, certainly amongst converts to Christianity, condemn the culture of multi-culturalism as being part of the cause of this lack of awareness and help. Many converts to Christianity among Iranians, and other groups, feel able to be quite open about their faith, but occasionally even then

² <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2015/may/17/losing-their-religion-british-ex-muslims-non-believers-hidden-crisis-faith>

³ <http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2013/05/confessions-ex-muslim>

⁴ <https://www.icmunlimited.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Mulims-full-suite-data-plus-topline.pdf> , <https://muslimstatistics.wordpress.com/2016/04/14/uk-muslim-poll-52-oppose-homosexuality-23-want-sharia-33-feel-they-influence-decisions-in-the-country/> and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/6309983.stm>

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostasy_in_Islam

there are problems, very occasionally even interference from the intelligence services of countries of origin. There seems to be a consensus, though, that generally Iranians are less badly persecuted, but that hostility and persecution is stronger in other communities, particularly the Pakistani community. One other trend that some apostates point to as a reason for their increasingly precarious position is that communities have gradually stopped self-identifying by culture or origin (Bengali, etc), and now self-identify as Islamic above all – communities are increasingly religious.

Several of our interviewees are or have been in an academic environment and expressed extreme disquiet at the way that converts voices are sidelined or suppressed. One interviewee pointed to a fairly recent press article involving a convert at a leading University training to be an Anglican priest who was actively discriminated against in a class part sponsored by an Arab king. The trainee priest had asked some critical questions regarding Islam in class, and after discovering he was a convert the lecturer told the class that anyone could ask questions except him. One recent article from a member of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain raises similar concerns based on much recent personal experience about the disturbing way that their free speech is restricted and double standards applied in academia, indicating some prominent universities are effectively acting as enforcers for Islamic ideology and implicitly blaming the ‘apostate’ victims of hate campaigns (although other reasons are officially given for the dubious decisions involved, such as ‘security reasons’).⁶

Finally, we should not ignore the elephant in the room – the root cause of such attitudes, over and above (or, perhaps better, beyond and below) community and social dynamics, and honour and shame culture and so forth, is a fundamentally religious and ideological reason, as we touched on briefly earlier. Although the Quran does not – as far as I can tell – contain any command about killing apostates, outside of the Quran, the most authoritative materials in Islam are the Hadith / Hadeeth, collections of the recorded sayings and doings of the Islamic prophet, written down several centuries after his time from oral traditions. This work is not the place to go into the more scholarly debate on these Hadith, but they were assessed and ranked for reliability or validity when the original collections were made, and they are foundational for the tenets of Sharia law (certainly those that are considered reliable), second only to the Quran itself. A number of the converts or apostates interviewed cited sayings of the Islamic prophet as recorded in the Hadith as the reasons for why they fear for their lives, and why the death of apostates is celebrated in front of them.⁷ Although some small proportion of the Islamic world seeks to say that the Hadith concerning apostasy are merely later impositions to try and buttress the positions and power of Islamic clerics and other authority figures⁸, for much, probably most, of the Islamic world, consider them very authoritative when thinking about the issue of apostasy. The position in the Hadith can be summed up by one passage that is most often quoted:

The Prophet said ‘Whoever changed his Islamic religion, then kill him’. (Bukhari 9.84.57)

Another saying from the same collection of Hadith says:

⁶ <http://maryamnamazie.com/more-restrictions-at-universities-and-words-of-warning/>

⁷ For what seems a pretty good overview of the issues, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith>

⁸ Eg <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/quranalyzeit/2014/02/14/blasphemy-and-apostasy-laws-islam-or-hislam/>

[The Islamic Prophet] 'A Muslim who has admitted there is no god but Allah and that I am His Prophet may not be killed except for three reasons: as punishment for murder, for adultery, or for apostasy.' (Bukharia 9.83.17)

To give an example of how this is discussed in modern times, I will quote from the youtube video of an Islamic religious leader from 2014:

Q : Some of the callers say the penalty for apostasy is not a theoretical concept, but just political. How do we respond to them?

Al-Fawzan :

No. Rather they say there is no penalty for apostasy meaning don't kill or penalize anyone for apostasy. The Prophet (saas) said : 'Whoever changes his religion, kill him'. Another hadith: 'the blood of a muslim is not allowed except in three cases – 'a life for a life', 'stoning the adulterer' and the one who apostates, separates from the Muslim community.

But they say 'the people are free with freedom of opinion' and they cite the verse in Qur'an, 'No compulsion in Religion' but they understand this verse the wrong way. 'No compulsion in religion' means upon entrance to the religion [of Islam] there is no forcing someone in the religion, because guidance is in Allah's hands (Might and Majestic). But when he enters the Deen [religion – Islamic], and understands it to be the truth, and holds to it, and yet still abandons it, then he is someone who is corrupt, who will corrupt others with his thinking, so it is a must to kill him, eradicate him, because he will be a source of corruption. The one who knows the religion is true and enters it, then after that apostates (sic), is none but a corrupt individual who will affect others with his thinking, so this is logical in the religion. Therefore it is a must to kill him. (Shaykh Salih Ibn Al-Fawzan)⁹

This gives some idea of how much of an imperative 'eliminating' apostates is for very significant portions of the Islamic religion. It also gives an idea of what drives the waves of hate crime that so many apostates face to one degree or another.

Introduction Summary:

The number of apostates in the UK is unknown but at a very minimum is in the high 10's of 1000's.

The majority convert to non-belief / humanism or Christianity.

Whilst a somewhat small proportion appear to face relatively few difficulties, many face extreme ostracism, death threats, abuse, violence, vicious verbal abuse, and even actual murder from family and community. They also often suffer from depression, guilt, shame and loneliness. Some feel forced to live in the shadows, in effect on the run, or to move away from their home community, and a relative few end up in safe houses for their own protection.

Whilst honour-shame culture plays an important role, at the root of such attitudes and actions is the firmly established policy of death for apostates that has a history as long as Islam itself, a policy that is explicitly stated in early Islamic religious texts that are generally considered authoritative.

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isloWlhLLAE>

The Interviews (short summaries only)

Due to the length requirements of publication, we only have very short summaries of the interviews here. A version with full interview summaries can be found here at the following webpage:

<http://www.britishpakistanichristians.org/blog/our-apostasy-hatred-report-as-submitted-to-uk-hate-crime-inquiry>

Only a relative few have been willing to be named (and several of those we chose to anonymize anyway for various reasons), mostly those whose names are already in the public domain. They cover a wide range of situations, from atheists to passionate Christian evangelists, from those who do not want to be named and try and live under the radar, to those who are well known in their communities. Some talked freely, some would only email in brief accounts of what they suffered. In some cases they were very forthright as to failings in government policy or in other areas of society, and what should be done to combat the threats they face. We have included these comments in the full version. We have sought the widest pool of input, although we have faced hostility from some atheist / humanist apostates who apparently fear our contact is covertly an attempt to convert them to Christianity.

Shaheen (pseudonym – although he was willing to give real name, Pakistani background)

Summary : Converted to Christianity while in Pakistan, from a violent and highly dysfunctional lifestyle, struggled with several issues for a long time, was beaten and left for dead in the UK by family members who got light sentences, he now boldly preaches Jesus in his local northern community, but still sometimes faces threats and aggressive behaviour, as do those who convert due to his evangelism. His story also involves his wife kicking him out after his conversion, and a local imam saying ‘You are Satan. If we were in Egypt or Syria, I would cut off your head’.

Mohammed Fyaz (real name, Pakistani background)

Summary: Ostracized by his family when he left home early, he has faced being taken to Pakistan by family members, deliberately keeps his location secret even from his church, and generally hides his status as convert from Muslims. He anticipates being forced to move again once a book about his life comes out, and has deliberately chosen to be single precisely because of the dangers as a convert. He receives death threats on Facebook, and is articulate about what the government needs to do to protect converts like him. He receives threats, including death threats, on social media quite regularly, but he believes them to be from abroad, and so sees no point in going to the police. He says that extremists in the UK generally know just how far to push without breaking the law as currently applied. He spoke strongly for the need for police and the state to deal far more effectively with what converts face, including recording hate crimes against ‘apostates’, saying ‘It is time for the government to take action to protect the religious freedom of those who want to leave Islam..... If we are to remain a free society it is **vital** that everyone should be able to choose their faith, or no faith. **Threats of death for those who leave Islam must be dealt with by Government and the Police.**’ He also said ‘Multiculturalism and freedom of speech have not failed Muslims. In fact it is Muslims, in particular the Pakistani communities who have failed to embrace multiculturalism and freedom of speech. My community needs to look hard at itself....’

Aaidun (pseudonym, Iranian background)

'Aaidun' is an Iranian, married with three adult or nearly adult children, from a Shiite background, who converted to Christianity in Iran, and came with his family to the UK a year later, and he now is a leader in an expanding Iranian church, currently about 40 strong, in a city in the southern part of England. He reports no actual threats of violence to him, but regular verbal abuse and discrimination, including boycotts of convert owned businesses, and accusations that the church is a CIA front. The church faces particularly hostile responses when they set up market-place stalls about their experience of God, such as 'We hate you, you are kaffir / infidel dogs'.

Saed (Pseudonym, background details unknown, but living in London)

(We were told by other converts that this gentleman had endured a lot more than he let on in this 'interview' – he would only really contact us by email). Saed reports being ostracised and verbally abused by a Muslim neighbour once his status as an 'apostate' was known, and of attending a talk at a leading college where several Muslims came in and intimidated people by videoing them and other tactics. He tries to avoid Muslims because of the way he has been treated.

Sadia Hameed (real name)

We were not able to fully interview Miss Hameed, but she did submit some material. We also understand that her brother, a fellow apostate, committed suicide, in large part as a result of the psychological pain and issues caused by his status and treatment as an 'apostate'.¹⁰ Various questions as a female minor about inequalities, and inadequate answers led to her leaving Islam in her mid-teens, with her mother warning she could be killed and to never talk about it again, leading to a double life that took a considerable mental toll. She now describes herself as an antitheist and a radical feminist. She talks of the intense isolation and mental health issues involved, whether by overt separation or by covert denial of the faith whilst appearing to continue as normal.

Seyyed (Pseudonym, didn't want background or gender reported)

Summary : Seyyed has faced some level of ostracism from family and friends, even though they were not particularly observant, gets regular threats and verbal abuse, and also has suffered from psychological games and intimidation, particularly in universities and colleges by Islamic Societies, and also being ejected from mainstream colleges after talking about their negative experiences and the religious basis for them. Seyyed experienced open discrimination in a university setting, and notes that converts are frequently targeted in a way that keeps just within the letter of the law whilst still intimidating with indirect threats of violence. Seyyed recounted the experience of other converts they know, including death threats, refusal of service in taxis and shops, and Muslim taxi drivers trying to reconvert them. Explicitly challenges the government to stand up for converts, and also challenged academia over attitudes and actions that effectively enable and support extremism.

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<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/suicides.and.revenge.attacks.documentary.to.reveal.plight.of.ex.muslims.in.britain/97175.htm>

'Saab' (Pseudonym, Pakistani Background)

Summary : Saab is a covert apostate (atheism), who because of the hostility to apostates keeps his status secret from family and friends, and will pretend to be a Muslim if he really has to, such as at the Pakistani embassy, or when he is pressed to go to Mosque, because of the fear of retaliation, including murder. He anticipates it will impact his marriage chances; it certainly affects his social life and his psychological well-being.

'Cam' (Pseudonym, Pakistani background)

Summary: 'Cam' started his journey towards the Christian faith in Pakistan, where he was miraculously healed of polio at a Christian healing event. He became a Christian after moving to the UK, and although his family were not hostile, with at least one a covert apostate, he has had to move to try and minimize hostility to his family after news of his conversion filtered out and Islamic religious leaders started to come and ask questions. His siblings' cars were vandalized, and it appears that a local counsellor's intervention stopped these attacks, but when he does visit his family, he only does so for short periods in the dead of night.

Padma (Pseudonym, although willing to give real name, Iranian background)

Summary: Padma came to the Christian faith by way of supernatural healing and encounters with angels in an Iranian hospital, but only came to faith after deep depression in the UK, through the love of a Christian woman at Speakers Corner. However, she has experienced abuse as a convert, both verbal and psychological intimidation at various locations, including at Speakers Corner, and the vandalizing of her car at her home. She says the verbal abuse is getting worse, and has on occasion been spat on for her conversion. Her father shunned her after he visited her in the UK, slapping her face and spitting in her face, but eventually was reconciled to her and her faith before he died.

'A' (Part-Pakistani lady born of a mixed faith marriage)

Summary : 'A' is from a mixed family, with a father who initially converted to Christianity, but then reverted to Islam and has been hostile, creating much tension in the family, and some shunning and angrily aggressive behaviour when she became a practicing Christian. She also receives disdain from old Muslim friends, and as well as describing the intense social isolation, and also reports on a level of intimidation and hatred in a college setting, including anti-semitism.

'Barry' (Pseudonym, Pakistani background)

Summary : 'Barry' is semi-openly an atheist apostate (although he would not describe himself as such) who, among other things, struggled with sentiment in Mosques that prayed regularly to be given superiority or authority over non-Muslims. He and his family have suffered some verbal abuse, and due to pressure from the local mosque he lived close to were forced to move house.

'Jaleel' (Pseudonym, Pakistani background)

Summary: 'Jaleel' is a covert apostate, who is agnostic. His journey was a gradual one, from strict Islamic adherence at university, but with questions and doubts about Islamic treatment of women and other issues, questions which became more forceful after 9/11. He recently left Islam altogether in his heart, and he describes the mental anguish caused by seeking to break from what he calls the indoctrination he was subjected to. He maintains an appearance of adherence to Islam

chiefly to protect his family from the pain of knowing the truth, but he is also well aware of the death penalty many hold is the proper punishment for apostasy.

'Abdul Aziz' (Pseudonym, location undisclosed, Gujarati background – Indian / Pakistani people group)

Summary: 'Abdul' left Islam for a kind of Buddhist-influenced spirituality as a teenager, and he has kept his status as an ex-Muslim secret for over a decade from all but a handful of people outside of his 'analogue' life. The reasons are fear of violence or death from extended family and others, fear of what the shame would do to his ailing mother, and fear of ostracism. He is unmarried because he fears it will compromise his secrecy, leading to tensions. He maintains a facade of Islamic observance, but it has a psychological toll, and he hopes one day to gain the inner strength to 'come out' publicly.

Nissar Hussain (Real name, Pakistani Background, Bradford).

Summary: Nissar, his wife and his children (ranging from under 10 to early/mid 20's) have faced close to two decades of sustained, vicious persecution for being converts to Christianity from Islam. It involved campaigns of violence, threats – including of rape, intimidation, harassment, spitting, drive-by bricking, burning out of cars, and the house on one occasion, abusive graffiti, and attempted murder. The police, in his experience, were, at least until near the very end, more interested in getting the family out of the area rather than dealing with the perpetrators: the family has had to move twice, once within Bradford, and finally recently had to be escorted out of Bradford by 10 armed police officers. He believes that the police, much of the Church and local and other politicians are in denial about the problem and speaks very strongly of the double standards involved in 'politically correct' approaches and the reality of a 'two-tier law system'. He regards the current situation as a betrayal of fundamental British values.

Discussion, recommendations and areas for further research

The above interviews contain a wide range of experiences, including at least one person who wouldn't call themselves 'apostate', ranging to those who have suffered severe and prolonged persecution, including violence amounting to attempted murder. More work is needed to try and gain a more specific idea of the range of experience of apostates, which ethnic or national communities are more affected, and so forth. Several wished to emphasize the climate of fear they have to live under and were deeply concerned not just about the actual persecution, or threat thereof, that they endure, but also about the way their voices are sidelined in much of wider society because their experiences don't fit the multicultural agenda, with at least one anxious about how possible public exposure will affect their career prospects (within the church, no less).

Whilst the state / government cannot directly control social attitudes, it does have a role in providing a lead where there is serious discrimination, a fact reflected in the various legislation and programs concerning hate crime around race, gender, sexuality, and so forth. Some of these causes have multiple well organised pressure groups and so forth to press their cause to the forefront, and have become very effective in shaping social attitudes within society. However, there is a grave danger that this means that hate crime that does not easily fit into these categories gets ignored, and 'apostates' are one of them. It needs to be recognized that due to human nature, those who are 'liminal' or cross boundaries in some way tend not to be viewed well, and that in some cultures this factor is extremely prominent, most or all Islamic cultures among them.

Arguably, religion and belief has always been something of a problem child in the diversity and equality 'rainbow', in part because of the amorphous nature of the grouping – there is such a wide range of religion and belief out there, and in part because there has been a strong tendency in significant parts of the opinion-forming portion of society that 'all religions are really teach the same', something that is manifestly and objectively false. For this reason, when we consider hate crime because of religion or belief we need to be aware of the great danger of heeding more those who 'shout' loudest, who are the most organized, or who have a ready-made term to describe hate against them, or who are more easily categorized as a readily recognized 'minority'.

Our recommendations are for the state / government to start taking the issue of convert-hatred or apostate-phobia much more seriously as it is a problem that is unlikely to go away, and shows every sign of getting worse, and it has been severely neglected. It is widely recognized, including by the Home Office, at least in their material on, for example, the situation of Christians in Pakistan, that converts face greater danger than 'regular' Christians. This often appears to be the case in the UK as well; for this reason, the treatment of converts or apostates is a kind of canary in the mine, warning of a rising problem that will go on to affect much more than just them if it is not addressed and rectified, and indeed, also will further affect freedom of religion, as part of the bedrock fundamental right of freedom of expression.

We recommend that there is a renewed emphasis on specifically freedom of religion, in a way that makes it clear that this is much more than just 'freedom of worship', which is a much narrower concept, and that there is emphasis on the freedom for a person to change ones religion or faith without being persecuted for it. We realize that people of many faiths would be unhappy if one of their number left their faith and may try to persuade them to come back, but it is clear that there is a large problem with outright bullying, harassment and violence for a significant proportion of 'apostates' in certain Asian or Middle Eastern communities in this country, which can be all too easily dismissed as 'neighbourly disputes' when in fact they amount to hate crime – perpetrated specifically because of someone's leaving the faith.

We also recommend that steps be taken to educate police, social services, educationalists and local authorities about the challenges and hatred that apostates can face. We realize that these arms of the state are all hard-pressed, with significant resource restraints, but it should not be too hard to provide material that highlights the issues, otherwise there is a danger of the police, for example, walking into a situation in which they miss some of the dynamics that may be at play – for instance, that it is not at all unknown for those who have left the Islamic faith to be accused of all sorts of wrong behaviour to disguise the fact that they are being targeted precisely because of their change of faith or belief, and that it is common for those who are victims of this kind of hate crime to be reluctant to report it. The reasons for this would be various, but include the fear that it could provoke even more violent attacks or harassment, and the fear of not being taken seriously (which then becomes a vicious circle – if police, or whatever other authority is involved, are unaware of the seriousness or sensitivity of the issue, or the powerful cultural and social forces and taboos, almost, that can be involved, then they won't take it seriously, but only have a culture of labelling these hate crimes as 'neighbourly disputes', for example).

Any policy driven change needs more than just anecdotal data, of course. Several of those interviewed strongly expressed the need to create a new category of hate crime in some fashion,

whether they used the term 'Christianophobia', 'Kaffir-phobia', 'apostate-phobia' or the like. Currently, hate crime is generally categorized by the perception of the victims, but there is strong anecdotal evidence, as shown in some of the cases in this report, that apostate victims of hate crimes are not having their crimes treated as such. We recommend that the term 'convert-phobia' be adopted and data collected under this heading, including information as to which (original) faith is involved. This would not be targeted at any one faith or religion, but would include any and all faiths or religions. It would give a clear idea of the relative problem areas (we are aware, for instance, that somewhat similar problems can affect people converting from or leaving Ultra-Orthodox or Orthodox Jewish communities, and also Sikh communities) meaning that the problem can more easily be quantified and resources or approaches adjusted accordingly – *and objectively, not according to where victims may or may not fit into a system dictated by the multi-cultural movement or approach*. In short, we recommend that attacks on converts / apostates be classified in the same way as other categories are under the amended Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006.

We recommend that places of religious worship or religious education (religious schools etc) specifically be either required, or at least vigorously encouraged, to sign up to a commitment to practices towards others' religious freedom and to non-violence that would include the requirement to unambiguously and categorically affirm that violence cannot be condoned in any circumstances, except those in which the law of the land allows for self-defence against sexual or other violence. Again, this would be across all faiths and religions: those that do sign up can be given some sort of charter mark to distinguish them from those who don't, and also it means that if either reports of teaching that are inconsistent with that commitment, or members of that place of worship engage in patterns of behaviour that do not conform to this commitment, they can be challenged and held to account more easily. This recommendation came from one of our interviewees, who pointed to similar recommendations from a former Middle Eastern Sharia court judge who converted to Christianity (and now lives in the UK).

We also recommend that all the Islamic centres and mosques and all the official Islamic related organisations in the UK should be asked to produce a statement in which they confirm they do not promote or teach Kafir-o-phobia or Apostate-o-phobia and do what they can to avoid Christianophobia of any sort. This is exactly the same kind of statement that organisations/schools/universities/etc in the UK are asked to do about Islamophobia. (This recommendation was from one of the apostates interviewed based on their wide range of experience in the education system, both direct and indirect.)

We further recommend that all schools, including faith schools, and more informal faith schools of all beliefs be required to prominently display and to promote the two sets of commitments recommended above to staff, pupils and parents. If places of education and other organisations are required to do this in general, and Christian schools required to do this regarding Islamophobia, for example, then it is only right that there should be a reciprocal and equally vigorously enforced emphasis in the opposite direction.

We further recommend that the government and / or Parliament should consider amending either legislation and or guidance for police and CPS, as appropriate, around incitement to violence and harassment, so that cases where the deliberate celebration of the killing of apostates, for example, is done in front of apostates to intimidate them without actually threatening to kill them should be

classed as hate crime and vigorously prosecuted. Applying such an approach to social media postings should also be seriously considered.

We also recommend that there be a clear direction to distinguish between criticism of the tenets or practices of a religion and incitement of hatred against individuals of that religion, as there has been significant blurring of this distinction in some areas; several of our interviewees specifically raised this point in one form or another, noting that for citing specific religious hadiths that they find objectionable routinely leads to them being labelled as 'Islamophobes' or shut down, and not just by Muslims, but in academia and other areas of public life.

Summary

Those who leave Islam face, at best, significant challenges due to rejection and worse by their former faith community. Many choose to keep their abandonment of the tenets of Islam a secret, and feign some level of continued observance where they must to keep up family or social obligations, because they know full well the ostracism and even violence that they would face if it became known. Those who become open will typically face violence and extreme harassment from a range of sources – close or extended family, friends and the wider society at large. The behaviours they face can be relatively petty on one level (forms of economic boycott), or they can in some cases be extreme campaigns of intimidation, violence and even murder ('honour killings'). Because even the relatively petty stuff is specifically because of the targets status as former Muslims, it is, by any reasonable measure, hate crime, crime specifically directed at them because of a protected personal characteristic. We interviewed people from a wide variety of areas and backgrounds, and found common threads: it is quite clear that the hatred behind these behaviours is widespread and deeply entrenched. Several of our interviewees pointed to specific religious / ideological causes for this. Several, particularly from the Christian converts from Islam, noted how skilled their persecutors were at staying just inside the enforced limits of the law on incitement to violence, whilst still clearly praising the killing of 'apostates' from Islam overseas in an extremely intimidating fashion. Several also spoke forcefully of their experience that some attitudes in wider society – sometimes variously described as multiculturalism or political correctness – as helping enable the perpetrators and suppress the victims and their experiences and relevant knowledge when it does not conform to particular dogmas, attitudes that seem in some cases to come out in academia in particular, but also in policing. We make various recommendations to help deal with these issues, to protect the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and freedom of religion for all of society, and to help ensure that those affected by this kind of hate crime are given support as appropriate by police, the educational system, local authorities and so forth. We also recommend the requirement of specific commitments to non-violence and freedom of religion in several spheres, including religious education and places of worship.

The British Pakistani Christian Association is a charity set up to help Pakistani Christians around the world where they have need of advocacy and aid. <http://www.britishpakistanichristians.org/>

The version with full interview summaries is at <http://www.britishpakistanichristians.org/blog/our-apostasy-hatred-report-as-submitted-to-uk-hate-crime-inquiry>

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