Part Two:
Frequently Raised Topics

When teaching young people about Islamophobia recurrent myths, stereotypes and misunderstandings will be raised. The aims of this chapter are to equip educators with structured questions, discussion points and facts, which will support some of these conversations.

This chapter does not provide a comprehensive overview of all the issues which will be raised but looks at some of the more frequent issues that have come up in EqualiTeach's work with young people over the past five years.

If young people bring up questions that you haven't previously considered it is fine to admit that you don't know the answer. Leaving a question unanswered to research the answer and impart accurate information later is a good practice as long as the question is not forgotten about completely. You could also research the answer with the young people present. Researching answers together not only ensures that young people are receiving accurate information but also teaches young people the value of research and how to research for information in a safe and effective way.
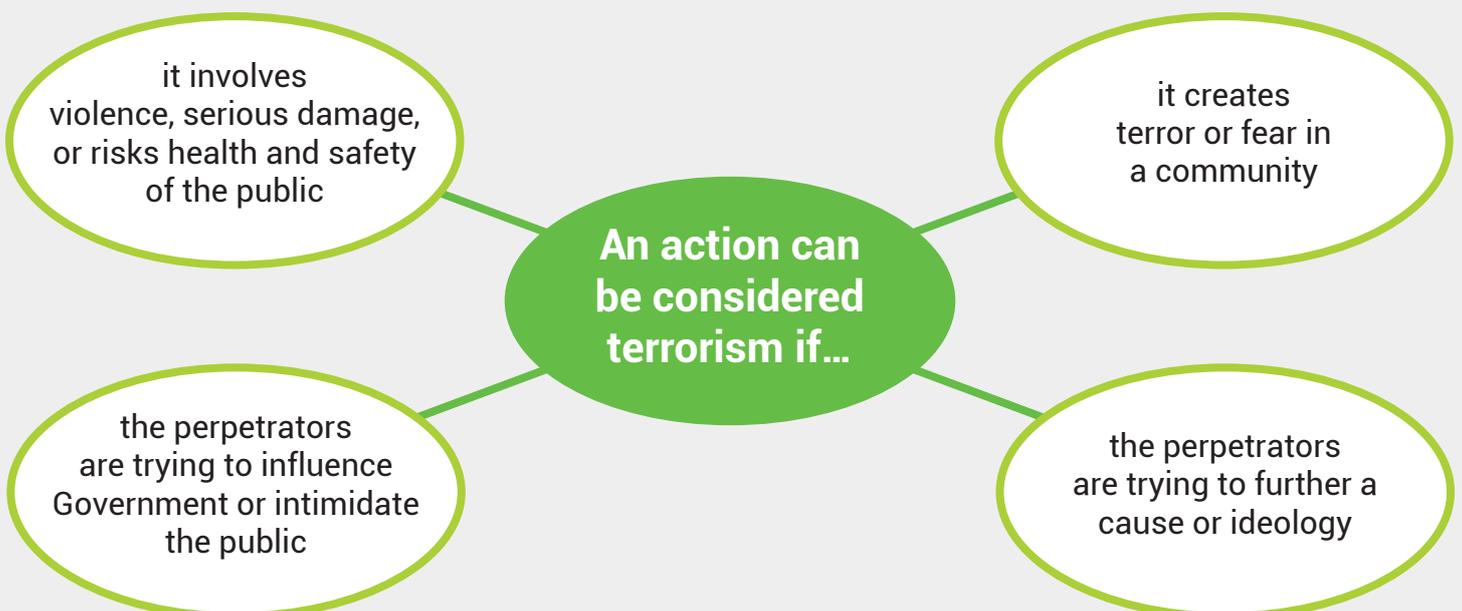
Terrorism

Due to the misleading coverage of Muslims in the news, which often connects Muslims and Islam with terrorism, it is highly likely that the issue of terrorism will come up.

Discussion: What is Terrorism?

Young people often have strong views on terrorism without a full understanding of what the word terrorism means. Give the young people a starting point for the definition: "An action can be considered terrorism if…" and ask the young people to think about all the factors involved, which would make an action fit this definition.

The example below shows the defining factors included in the legal definition of terrorism:

it involves violence, serious damage, or risks health and safety of the public

it creates terror or fear in a community

An action can be considered terrorism if…

the perpetrators are trying to influence Government or intimidate the public

the perpetrators are trying to further a cause or ideology

(HM Government, 2000)

Once this is established it can be a springboard for further discussion:

The news agency AJ+ and Reuters have decided not to use the word terrorism in their reporting as they feel that it is a politically loaded term, and often not applied evenly. They describe the facts of what has happened without attributing it. AJ+ explain their reasoning here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaC_bzgtODY.

Even when people state that they are acting on behalf of a religion or culture, perpetrators of acts of violence do not have the backing of the communities or faiths that they claim to represent. For example, in the case of the murder of Lee Rigby, one of the killers referred to himself as a 'soldier of Allah'. However, Farooq Murad, secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain, called the murder a "barbaric act" and said that Muslim communities were "united in their condemnation of this crime". He added that "this was a dishonourable act and no cause justifies cold-blooded murder."

When a classmate asked 19-year-old Heraa Hashmi why Muslims didn't condemn terrorism she went home and created a 712-page document with sources of Muslims condemning things. This has now evolved into the website www.muslimscondemn.com (The Guardian, 2017)

There are 1.7 billion Muslims in the world—that is one quarter of the world's population. There are Muslims from every ethnicity and every country in the world. Someone who is a Muslim is no more likely to cause someone else harm than someone from any other religion.
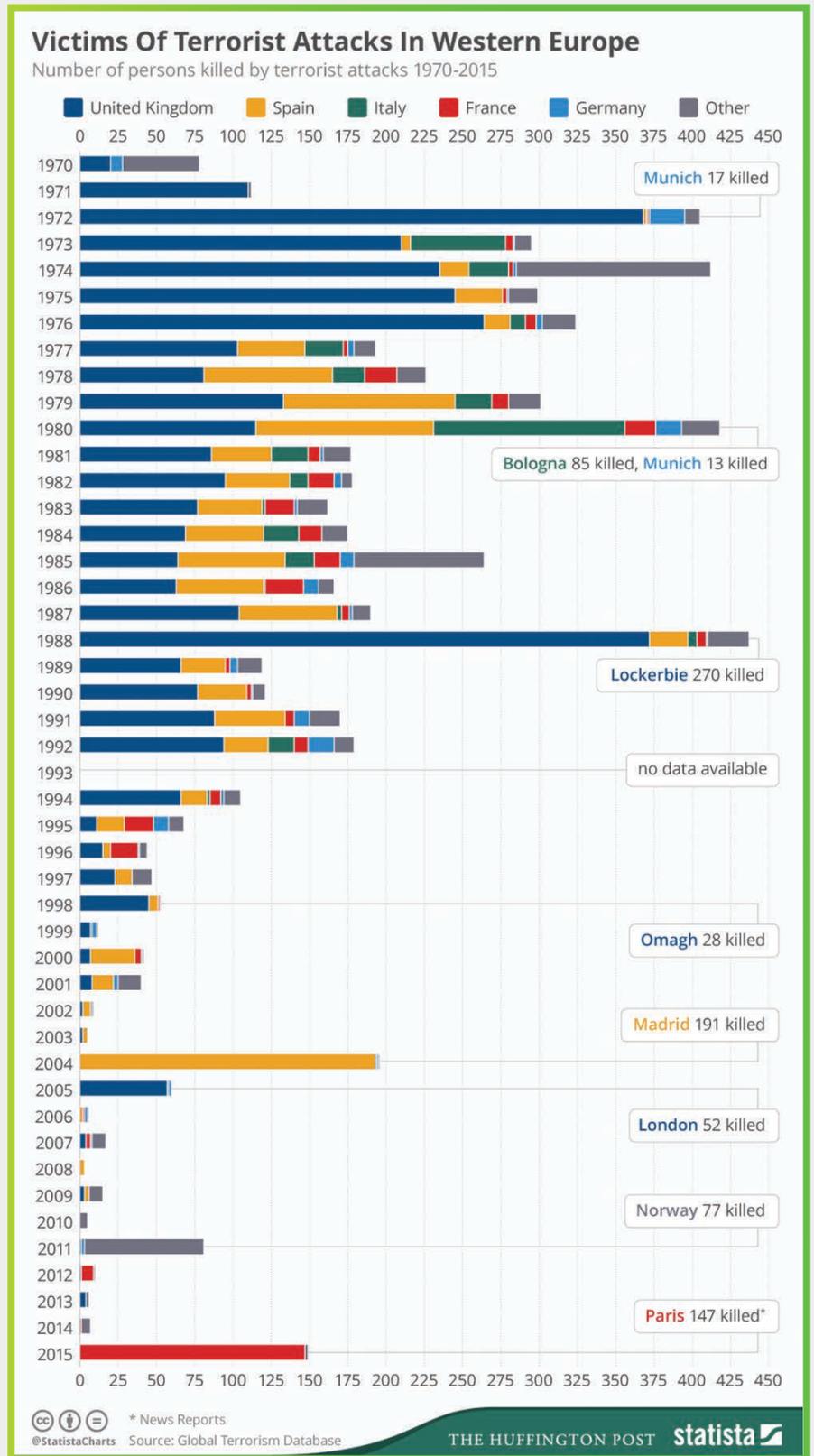

Heraa Hashmi

Discussion Points:

- Should Muslims have to condemn terrorist acts, which they have had nothing to do with?
- Should Christians have to condemn violent acts committed by the KKK or Westboro Baptist Church?
- If someone from your town or city commits a violent act, should you have to apologise on behalf of your town?
- Who do the perpetrators of violence represent?

Examples of Terrorism

The Troubles in Northern Ireland

The IRA (Irish Republican Army) was an armed, largely Catholic group who wanted Northern Ireland to join with Ireland and be separate from the UK. There were divisions between them and the Loyalists who were largely Protestant and wanted Northern Ireland to remain under UK rule. Between the 1970s and 1990s there were violent campaigns by both groups, known as The Troubles. The IRA carried out deadly bombings in Britain and Northern Ireland. Armed Loyalist groups responded by killing Catholics. For the UK, these years were the most dangerous in recent history with regards to terrorism, as illustrated in the graph to the right:

Victims Of Terrorist Attacks In Western Europe
Number of persons killed by terrorist attacks 1970-2015

Legend: United Kingdom | Spain | Italy | France | Germany | Other

Annotations on chart:
- Munich 17 killed
- Bologna 85 killed, Munich 13 killed
- Lockerbie 270 killed
- no data available (1993)
- Omagh 28 killed
- Madrid 191 killed
- London 52 killed
- Norway 77 killed
- Paris 147 killed*

* News Reports
@StatistaCharts Source: Global Terrorism Database

THE HUFFINGTON POST statista

London after an IRA bomb in the 1990s

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So called Islamic State (Daesh)

So called Islamic State grew out of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. They say that they are Sunni Muslims, who believe in an extreme interpretation of Islam. So called Islamic State has a particularly violent ideology and calls itself a caliphate. Followers claim to be the only true believers of Islam and claim religious authority over all Muslims. They say that everyone who doesn't support them is out to destroy Islam, and they use this claim to justify horrific attacks on other Muslims (both Sunni and Shia) and Christians in the areas that they control and on people in other countries around the world.

The name 'Islamic State' has been rejected by major Muslim organisations and governments, who say the group is not Islamic and is not a state.

So called Islamic State has been designated a terrorist organisation by the United Nations and many individual governments. From 2014-2017 it controlled a large area of land, which crossed over the border between Iraq and Syria. However, as of January 2018 it has lost 98% of the land that it previously controlled. As so called Islamic State loses territory, other offshoots are emerging and are having a presence in many different conflicts around the region.

A shopping Centre in Baghdad after an explosion caused by so called Islamic State which killed 324 people who were preparing to celebrate the end of Ramadan.

Thomas Mair

In June 2016 Thomas Mair murdered MP Jo Cox by shooting and stabbing her multiple times. It was reported by witnesses that he shouted, 'Britain First', 'This is for Britain' and 'Keep Britain independent' whilst carrying out the attack. When police searched his house, they found far-right reading material, symbols and objects, including books on the Nazis and white supremacism. His browsing history revealed that he had been searching for material about the British National Party, apartheid and the Ku Klux Klan.

It has been reported that Thomas Mair believed that the existence of White people was being threatened and that this fear led to a deep bitterness towards people who agreed with immigration and who wanted to remain in the EU. He saw Jo Cox, a defender of immigration and a Remain campaigner, as a traitor to White people. Mair was sentenced to a whole life prison sentence. The prosecution said that his crimes were nothing less than acts of terrorism.

Discussion points:

- Thomas Mair is White and British; should all White and British people be held responsible for his actions?
- The headlines above show how the British press reported on Thomas Mair. How does it differ from other reporting on terrorist attacks that you have seen? What impact does this have on people's perception of communities?

Women's Rights

Often, criticisms of Muslims and Islam centre around women's rights and freedoms. Legitimate criticism of oppression and a fight for gender equality is of course to be welcomed. However, sometimes women's rights are hijacked by those with other motives, or criticisms are applied inconsistently.

Talk of Muslim women only in terms of oppression ignores the massive diversity amongst Muslim women, removes agency from Muslim women and perpetuates stereotypes. These stereotypes are a contributing factor to statistics such as: only 29% of Muslim women aged 16 to 24 are employed compared to half the overall population (Sheikh, 2018).

Clothing

Muslim women's dress is often the subject of debate within the UK, whether it is the suggestion that wearing the full face veil (niqab) should be banned, or whether school girls aged 8 and under should be allowed to wear a headscarf (hijab). Those who criticise the wearing of such garments often say that they are indicative of women's oppression, that women and girls are forced to wear them and that they demonstrate a lack of integration into British society.

EqualiTeach have blogged about the furore surrounding young children and the hijab; you can view the blog at www.equaliteach.co.uk/blog

However, many Muslim women state that whether to wear a hijab or niqab is a choice that they themselves make. Many of those who chose to wear it say that they enjoy the freedom to express their religion and be free from societal expectations:

'I see the hijab as a symbol of freedom because with it, I no longer have to comply with the expected standards of the society showcased by magazines, TV, or celebrity lifestyles. Hijab gives me the freedom to set my own standards to live up to without worrying about what the world has to say, which to me is extremely liberating!' (Groome, 2017)

Research by Tell Mama (2017) found that 56% of the targets of Islamophobia in person, are women, and in over 80% of cases the women were wearing the hijab or niqab. The London Development Agency (2008) found 50% of women who wore headscarves felt religious discrimination blocked

opportunities to progress at work. 18% were able to find jobs once they took off their headscarves and/or face veils (Sheikh, 2018). Therefore, rather than being forced to wear the hijab or niqab, some Muslim women feel forced to remove their headscarves and veils for fear of discrimination or violence.

Four women speak about their decision about whether to wear a hijab or not here: http://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/women-reveal- why-they-choose-to-wear-a-hijab

Fatima Manji is a news reporter for Channel 4. She has won a number of awards for her journalism and in 2015 she was a finalist for the Royal Television Society's Young Journalist of the Year.

Dina Tokio (http://www.dinatorkia.co.uk/) is a fashion vlogger, and is a part of YouTube's 'Creators for Change' campaign. With over a million followers on Instagram and over 700,000 subscribers on YouTube she uses her online platform to raise awareness about "modest fashion"- fashion that is designed to cater for those who prefer to show less skin. She also created a recent Youtube series called #YourAverageMuslim.

Ijtihad Mohammed is an Olympic Fencer for the USA, who won a bronze medal for fencing in the 2016 Olympics.
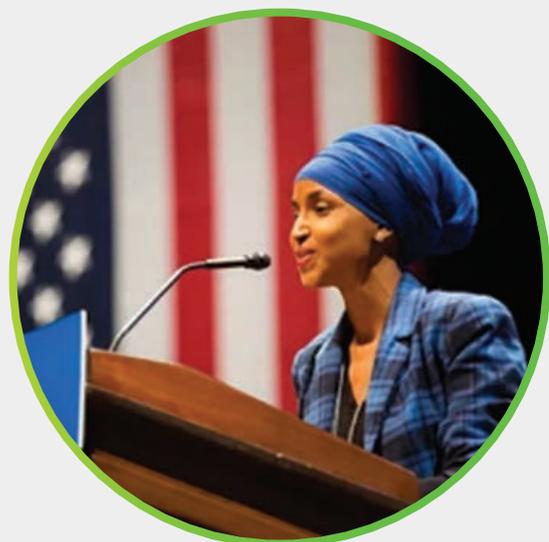
Ilhan Omar made history by becoming the first Muslim woman of East African descent to be elected as a U.S. State Representative. Ilhan is a Somali-American refugee. She is a graduate from North Dakota State University, having studied political science and international studies.

Forced Marriage

The Qur'an states that a woman has the right to choose her own partner and the vast majority of Muslims do not believe in forced marriages.

Forced marriage is not a Muslim issue. It is a practice which cuts across lots of different religious and cultural groups. Perpetrators who force their children or other family members into marriage often justify their behaviour as protecting their children, building stronger families and preserving cultural beliefs. However, every major faith condemns it and freely given consent is a prerequisite of all religions.

It is important to draw a distinction between arranged and forced marriage. Arranged marriage is a practice that exists among many different national and cultural groups. In an arranged marriage the families of both spouses take a leading role in arranging the marriage, but the choice of whether to accept the arrangement remains with the prospective spouses. Both parties must be fully consenting for the marriage to take place.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is not exclusive to any culture, nationality or religion. Statistically 80-90% of people who commit sexual abuse in this country are White British men (Lee, 2017).

Due to some high-profile cases of sexual grooming in the media, particularly in Rochdale and Rotherham, which have been largely perpetrated by men of Pakistani origin, some people have connected the issue of sexual abuse with Muslim men. It does appear as though Asian men are over-represented in cases where girls are groomed by groups of men. However, grooming is only a small part of the abuse threat facing Britain's children and this overrepresentation is likely down to the occupations that people work in. Asian men are more likely to be employed in the night-time economy, for example, in takeaways and as taxi drivers, thus providing the criminal element of the population the opportunity to engage in this type of abuse.

Child sexual exploitation has been widely condemned by Muslims across the UK. As Nazir Afzal, the Crown Prosecution Service's lead on child sexual abuse, says, it is vital not to attack a whole community because the actions of a small number of men. "Criminality begins and ends with the criminal, and not collectively with the law-abiding communities" (Gentleman, 2014).

Animal Rights

Often groups who are campaigning against Islam in the UK use halal food as a focus for their outrage. Halal means 'permissible' in Arabic and describes anything that's allowed under Islamic law. Although it is most often used to describe food and drink, halal can refer to any object or activity. Anything not allowed is referred to as haram.

The production of halal meat involves killing through a cut to the jugular vein, carotid artery and windpipe. Animals must be alive and healthy at the time of slaughter and all blood is drained from the carcass. During the process, a Muslim will recite a dedication, known as tasmiya or shahada (Meikle, 2014).

The RSPCA says slaughter without pre-stunning causes "unnecessary suffering". However, UK Food Standards Agency figures from 2011 suggest 84% of cattle, 81% of sheep and 88% of chickens slaughtered for halal meat were stunned before they died.

Supermarkets selling halal products say they stun all animals before they are slaughtered. Tesco says the only difference between the halal meat it sells, and other meat is that it was blessed as it was killed (Eardley, 2014).

There is an ongoing argument as to whether halal slaughter is more or less humane than other forms of animal slaughter, and there is not universal agreement on the issue.

Campaigning for animal rights is a positive cause. However, when that focus is solely on religious slaughter and omits other animal welfare issues such as battery farming and the animals' wellbeing during their lives, then there needs to be some reflection as to the true underlying reason for the anger.

Discussion Points:

- In 2014, The Sun newspaper ran this front cover about Pizza Express using halal chicken on its pizzas. Though Pizza Express had been sharing the fact that it used halal chicken on its websites since 2012. The reaction was so great that both Pizza Express and halal trended on Twitter. Why do you think that The Sun chose to run this headline?

- In 2017 an old picture of a Cadbury's employee in Asia with a certificate showing that all of its products were certified as halal surfaced on social media and caused a massive furore with people saying that Cadbury was "ruining Easter" and threatening to boycott the company.
  Cadbury's responded to the furore with the following statement: "None of our UK products are halal certified and we have never made any changes to our chocolate to specifically make them halal. They are just suitable for those following a halal diet in the same way that standard food such as bread or water. As our chocolate products do not contain meat, the ritual of halal does not apply and in the UK carry no halal certifications of any kind" (Rodionova, 2017).
  How does this incident demonstrate that many who are anti-Halal are not focussed on animal welfare?

Myths about 'Political Correctness'

Every year stories circulate on social and traditional media about how Muslims are trying to ban Christmas. One of the original sources of this story originates from the actions of Birmingham City Council in 1997.

Birmingham City Council's event team were looking to create a marketing strategy to cover 41 days and nights of activity that ran from BBC Children in Need to New Year's Eve. They decided to market all the events together as part of a big, exciting programme. Crucially, none of the individual events would be changed in any way; they would merely be marketed as part of something much bigger and more exciting than the sum of its parts. Eventually 'Winterval' was chosen as the name for this programme.

The term 'Winterval' was then picked up by the newspapers, which for the next 14 years ran stories along the lines of "Christmas is Banned: It Offends Muslims". These reports stated that councils were now too afraid to celebrate or mention Christmas, replacing it with 'Winterval' and the fault for this lay at the feet of Muslims.

However, Christmas was at the heart of Winterval.
The Christmas events included 'an open-air ice rink, Frankfurt open-air Christmas market and the Christmas seasonal retail offer', there was a banner across the council offices which read 'Merry Christmas' and Christmas lights and trees in the civil squares.

In November 2011, the Daily Mail printed a retraction: "We are happy to make clear that Winterval did not rename or replace Christmas". However, the myth that Muslims are somehow influencing councils to ban Christmas remains strong (Arscott, 2011).
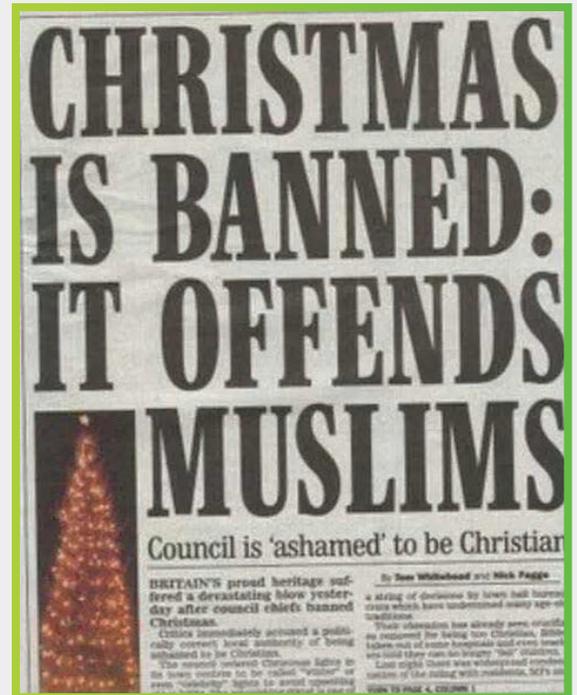
In 2016 Sweden banned Christmas lights from lampposts as the poles aren't designed to take the extra weight and so it was a safety hazard. This was picked up and incorrectly attributed to the Swedish authorities not wanting to offend Muslim immigrants. There is a two minute video which uses this incident as an example of the importance of fact-checking, here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ryjpu-NWYm8

Fact checking websites such as Snopes – www.snopes.com and Hoax-Slayer – www.hoax-slayer.com are very useful for checking the veracity of new stories as they emerge.