

Teaching for **SOLIDARITY**

July 7th 2005

On July 7th 2005, four young Muslim men strapped bombs to their backs, intending to blow themselves up and kill as many people as possible. They travelled from Luton to London and carried out their deadly mission during the morning rush hour on Underground trains at Edgware Road, Kings' Cross and Aldgate and the number 30 bus in Tavistock Square. That morning 52 people were murdered and 700 were injured, many permanently maimed.

"At 8.50 am, Manjit Dhanjal was sitting on a packed Circle Line train between Aldgate East and Liverpool Street station, on her way to work in the City. "There were a few sparks and I thought it was just a power surge. Then I saw this fireball a few carriages in front of me and everything went black. No-one knew what was happening; there was just panic...It was horrendous. People were lying on the floor, covered in blood, screaming, 'Help me, I'm dying,' but the paramedics couldn't get to them. The train had been packed and it looked like carnage in there...Just before the explosion I had been thinking about my 26th birthday on Monday. Now I thought I was going to die." ' (The Independent 8.7.5)



(Rex Features; Reuters; PA)

Rumours spread that there had been a 'power surge.' London's transport system ground to a halt. Mobile phones stopped working. Soon the rumours were replaced by facts. Terrorists had struck with co-ordinated bomb attacks, blowing themselves up in the most crowded places at peak hour and in tunnels, in order to ensure maximum mayhem and make rescue a nightmare. It was the first successful bomb attack on the Underground since it was built in 1863. British intelligence networks had not detected it and there was no warning. The attacks were carried out only a month after security levels in London had been downgraded to one of the lowest levels since 2001. People throughout the country and beyond asked, Why did this happen? Who were the bombers?

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The bombers were all British, some were fathers and popular members of their communities. Mohammed Sadique Khan was 30 and from Dewsbury, he worked as a support teacher for children with special needs, had an 8 month old daughter and he and his wife were expecting a second child. Shehzad Tanweer was 21 and planning a career in sport. Hasib Hussain, 18, was from Leeds and Germaine Lindsay, 19 a convert to Islam, was from Ayelsbury, and a carpet fitter. Their families and neighbours had no idea they were planning such a devastating act. The shock of discovering that they were citizens of the UK led to heightened discussion of issues about identity, belonging and Britishness which have been with us forever but suddenly became more public. Trying to make sense of the attacks, questions of who we are and how we can live together in the UK were brought into sharp focus.

Jodie Reynolds, a neighbour of one of the men in Leeds told a reporter, 'I just can't believe that young lad, with his whole life ahead of him, would carry a bomb on his back and get on a bus and blow himself up. What on earth would have made him do it?' (July 12th 2005 *International Herald Tribune*).

In his video message to the UK, one of the bombers, Mohammed Sadiq Kahn said:

'Your democratically elected government continually perpetuates injustice against my people all over the world and your support for them makes you directly responsible. Our religion is Islam, obedience to the one true god, Allah. This is how our ethical stances are dictated. Until we feel security, you will be our targets. Until you stop the bombing and gassing and imprisonment and torture of our people, we will not stop this fight. We are at war and I am a soldier. Our words have had no impact upon you therefore we will talk to you in a language you will understand.'

The bombers claimed their action was justified by Islamic teachings and the belief that because Allah says if someone transgresses against you, you do the same and that it is justified to attack the enemies of Islam in order to prevent harm to yourself. Such statements provoked fierce and profound disagreements in the UK Muslim community. For most Muslims Islam is all about living in harmony and peace.

In the analysis of what happened on July 7th and why, key Islamic concepts were cited. One was the Covenant of Security which tells Muslims how to live and behave while living in a non-Muslim land. In return for safety and freedom, they must abide by the law and are not allowed to attack the nation that is their home or cause harm to the people of that country. Early in 2005, Mohammed Omar Bakhri leader of Al-Muhajiroun, which is banned in the UK, declared the Covenant had been broken (he has since retracted this) due to anti-terror legislation which allows for the detention without trial of people suspected of being terrorists.

The other vital concept for many Muslims is that of the Umah, the notion that Muslims worldwide are one whole. Whereas national identity is based on geography, the Umah is stronger, it includes all Muslims in the world ('a brotherhood') so that if any one part of

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it is unwell or suffering, then other Muslims must defend it. Both the Umah and the concept 'Jihad' ('to struggle') have become politicised. Since the wars in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Chechnya and Iraq and citing Israel's treatment of Palestinians, some British Muslims identify with the suffering of other Muslims and went to join those they see resisting occupation.

Much of the subsequent media attention focused on the alienation and disengagement of young Muslim men and women in Britain but many people who knew them did not consider the bombers to be 'alienated'. Most people did not judge the July 7th bombings to be a political act. The then Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, captured this perspective on the day:

'I want to say one thing specifically to the world. This was not a terrorist act against the mighty and the powerful. It was not aimed at presidents and prime ministers...It was an indiscriminate attempt to slaughter, irrespective of any considerations for age, for class, for religion or whatever. That isn't an ideology, it isn't even a perverted faith, it is just... mass murder. Londoners will not be divided by this cowardly attack. They will stand together in solidarity alongside those who are injured and bereaved. I said yesterday to the International Olympic Committee that the city of London is the greatest in the world because everybody lives side by side in harmony...I wish to speak directly to those who came to London today to take life. I know that you personally do not fear giving up your own life in order to take others – that is why you are so dangerous. But I know you fear that you may fail in your long-term objective to destroy our free society. Whatever you do, however many you kill, you will fail.'

Thousands of people's lives continue to be permanently affected. One of them is Marie Fatayi- Williams whose son Anthony was murdered: On July 11th 2005, standing by the wrecked double decker bus she held up a photograph of her son and said:

"This is Anthony. Anthony Fatayi -Williams, 26 years old, he's missing and we fear that he was in the bus explosion on Thursday. We don't know. We do know from the witnesses that he left the Northern line in Euston. We know he made a call to his office at Amec at 9.41 from the NW1 area to say he could not make [it] by the tube but he would find alternative means to work.

Since then he has not made any contact with any single person. Now New York, now Madrid, now London. There has been widespread slaughter of innocent people. There have been streams of tears, innocent tears. There have been rivers of blood, innocent blood. There has been death in the morning, of people going to find their livelihood and death in the noontime on the highways and streets.

They are not warriors. Which cause has been served? Certainly not the cause of God, not the cause of Allah because God Almighty only gives life and he is full of mercy. Anyone who has been misled, or is being misled to believe that by killing innocent people he or she is serving God should think again because it's not true. Terrorism is not

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the way. It doesn't beget peace. We can't deliver peace by terrorism, never can we deliver peace by killing people. Throughout history, those people who have changed the world have done so without violence, they have [won] people to their cause through peaceful protest. Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, their discipline, their self-sacrifice, their conviction made people turn towards them, to follow them. What inspiration can senseless slaughter provide? Death and destruction of young people in their prime as well as old and helpless can never be the foundations for building society.

It's time to stop and think. We cannot live in fear because we are surrounded by hatred. Look around us today. Anthony is a Nigerian, born in London, worked in London, he is a world citizen. Here today we have Christians, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, all of us united in love for Anthony. Hatred begets only hatred. It is time to stop this vicious cycle of killing. We must all stand together, for our common humanity.

He didn't do anything to anybody, he loved everybody so much. If what I hear is true, even when he came out of the underground he was directing people to take buses, to be sure that they were OK. Then he called his office at the same time to tell them he was running late. He was a multi-purpose person, trying to save people, trying to call his office, trying to meet his appointments. What did he then do to deserve this. Where is he, someone tell me, where is he?"

Discussion:

7 July 2005 was a horrifying day. Many teachers and students in the United Kingdom know someone who was there, perhaps you were. Before discussing what happened, why and its effect, take a few moments to write a reflection on that day. What do you remember about it? Discuss these reflections. Then move on to exploring what questions you remember having about the day. Did you have the opportunity to discuss them with your parents? Friends? Teachers?

Discuss the video message Mohammed Sadiq Khan recorded and the reasons some people might give in order to explain their support for the bombings. Do you agree with Ken Livingstone that this was not a political act?