

# Strategies of Community Mobilization and Assertiveness among London's Sikh Communities

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Britain's Sikhs constitute a complex community. They are a well-established group and benefit from a rather positive image, which, in addition to historical reasons rests on their success story in Britain, mostly from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to present.

Paradoxically, they frequently describe their identity as a 'mistaken' one, which has suffered from the overt focus on Muslims and Islam since 9/11 and 7/7. Their problem, in their view, is that owing to their enviable socio-economic profile, they do not constitute a 'problem community', which means that they tend to get little or no attention from the British government, in which, paradoxically, they seem to have a high level of trust.

Although they are not the targets of the government's counter-terrorism strategy, they have, in a way suffered from it, as paradoxically, the focus on Muslims as a 'problem group' has somehow led to a further confusion about the nature of their faith and culture or indeed, to racist attacks.

Given that Sikhism is rooted in Punjab and the Punjabi language, one would expect them to form a homogenous community. However, owing to the divisions and inner feuds we have identified amongst them, they are better analyzed as being plural 'communities' rather than a single 'community'. For example, from a socioeconomic standpoint, one can distinguish Sikhs from the Indian subcontinent (or their descendants) from the comparatively more privileged East African Asians (a minority of whom were Sikhs), who settled in the UK between the late 1960s (Kenya, 1968) and the mid-late 1970s (Malawi, 1976) as a result of the implementation of 'Africanization' policies in those former British colonies, where some of them as settled as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Likewise, the outward signs of religious affiliation vary a lot amongst Sikhs, ranging from *Keshdari* Sikhs (i.e. turban-wearing Sikhs, with a full beard and uncut hair) to *Mona* Sikhs (clean-shaven Sikhs), who still consider themselves full-fledged Sikhs.

As regards social classes, Britain can boast several Sikh multimillionaires, such as Jasminder Singh, a Sikh who left Kenya at the turn of the 1970s and now is the chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Radisson Edwardian Hotels group. However, despite such spectacular success stories, Singh and Singh Tatla argue that on the whole, British Sikhs are 'middle-level achievers' who have striven hard to go up the social ladder given that they tended to come from 'a preliterate, rural society and entered the labor market after the Second World War at its lowest level, as unskilled manual workers'.<sup>1</sup> Britain's Sikhs were initially characterized by numerous kinds of social divisions, although the gap has somehow tended to be bridged over the past few decades:

The changes in employment since the Second World War [...] have produced a more socially differentiated community that is segmented into sharply defined social groups and specialist labor markets marked by distinct generational differences. The solid core once provided by the proletarian culture and traditions of the early settlers has begun to erode and has been replaced by a more complex mosaic of social groups, identities and varied patterns of employment in which the rise of the business community and increasing female employment have played a not inconsiderable part<sup>2</sup>

Despite their high level of education and the middle class status that most of them seem to have reached, paradoxically there are currently no Sikh members in the House of Commons, only two in the House of Lords and few local councilors.

### **The Sikhs: essential historical landmarks**

There are just over 20 million Sikhs worldwide, the vast majority of whom in India (approximately 19 million). The cradle of Sikhism is Punjab, where roughly 14.5 million Indian Sikhs live. Sikhs form sizeable communities ('little Punjabs') in a limited number of cities or regions: the greater London area (Ealing, Southall, Redbridge, Ilford); the Midlands (Wolverhampton, Birmingham). Thousands of UK Sikhs may however be described as 'East

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<sup>1</sup>Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla, *Sikhs in Britain : The Making of a Community*, London / New York, Zed Books, 2006, p.164

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup><http://www.unitedsikhs.org/mission.php> (retrieved on 2 January 2016)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

African Asians'. That diversity is reflected among our survey's respondents, who include Sikhs from India, Kenya, Uganda or indeed, Iran.

Sikhism is a syncretic religion founded by Nanak, a Punjabi preacher, in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Gobind (1666-1708), the last *guru*, instituted "the five ks", the best-known tenets of Sikhism: men's beards and uncut hair (*kes*) are held by a comb (*kangha*). Men have to wear a small dagger (*kirpan*), a metal bracelet (*kara*), as well as a long underwear that comes just above the knees (*kaach*). The turban, though a highly symbolic issue, is not technically part of the five ks. In addition to the above-mentioned requirements, a number of age-old taboos are still in existence among many practicing Sikhs, such as: smoking; eating halal or kosher meat (still a highly sensitive issue, as underlined by several of our respondents) or indeed sexual intercourse with Muslim women. Invariably, Sikh men add *Singh* ('lion') to their name and women, *Kaur* ('princess') to theirs. It is thanks to these names that one can distinguish the names of men from those of women. Indeed, in the Sikh religion, men's and women's first names are identical, a possible indication of Sikhs' much-vaunted commitment to gender equality, almost unanimously underlined by our respondents

On the whole, Sikhs remained loyal to the Crown during the Great Mutiny (1857) and thereafter benefited from preferential recruitment within the Indian Army. Their loyalty to Britain earned them the lasting animosity of Hindus and Muslims, but also created, according to Gurharpal Singh, a privileged, albeit questionable 'Anglo Sikh link', based on mutual respect. In 1908, what few Sikhs (students from the Punjabi bourgeoisie, mostly) lived in the London area founded Britain's first Sikh Association, *Khalsa Jatha of the British Isles* (KJBI), affiliated with the *Chief Khalsa Divan* (CKD), then the main Sikh Association in Punjab. KJBI members raised funds, both in England and India, in order to found a *Gurdwara* in London. A building was purchased in Shepherd's Bush, which underwent a complete architectural change thus becoming Britain's first real purpose-built *Gurdwara*, in 1913. Singh and Singh Tatla note that, because of the then limited numbers of Sikhs, the Shepherd's Bush *Gurdwara*, where part of our survey was carried out in 2015 given its historical importance and its continued influence on Britain's Sikhs, remained the only real one in the country until the early 1950s.

### **Fieldwork methodology: associations and individuals investigated**

The interviews, based on a common questionnaire, were conducted with eleven community leaders and chairpersons of associations, in two distinct phases: one in February 2015, the

other in May of the same year. The study sample is made up of the main Sikhs associations based in London (except for the Sikh Channel, based in Birmingham). The various organizations were chosen owing to their significance in the London Sikh landscape. All the associations surveyed are listed below in the chronological order of the interviews conducted:

- United Sikhs is an UN-affiliated, international, non-profit, non-governmental, humanitarian relief, human development and advocacy organization created in 1999 in the US. It is a registered charity in England and Wales under the Charities Act 1993, Charity Number 111 2055. United Sikhs is also present in other countries such as Canada, Australia, Belgium, France, Pakistan, India (Punjab), Malaysia as well as the Republic of Ireland. In their mission statement, United Sikhs state that they want to “transform underprivileged and minority communities and individuals into informed and vibrant members of society through civic, educational and personal development programs, by fostering active participation in social and economic activity”.<sup>4</sup> (Interview conducted with Gurjit Gill on February 10<sup>th</sup> 2015)

- The Southall-based Sikh Missionary Society was founded in 1969. It is a religious association whose aim is to promote the Sikh faith, both within and outside the UK. It has a resource center and a library and organizes language (Punjabi) and faith classes aiming at maintaining and promoting Sikhism among the young generation.<sup>5</sup>(Interview conducted with Bahadur Singh on February 11<sup>th</sup> 2015)

- Sikh Police was set up in 2014. It replaced and extended the scope of the Metropolitan Police Sikh Association (2007-2013). It is an independent, non-campaigning organization. The aim of Sikh Police is to implement a ‘policing model to help, support and empower the most vulnerable in society’<sup>6</sup>. Its one of the many staff support associations, alongside other ethnic, religious or sexual orientation associations such as, e.g. Association of Muslim Police; Jewish Police Association; Metropolitan Black Police Association; Metropolitan Police Service Chinese and South East Asian Staff Association; Metropolitan Police Hindu Association or Gay Police Association. (Interview conducted with Palbinder Singh on February 12<sup>th</sup> 2015).

- The Sikh Channel is a UK-based TV channel launched in 2009. Its broadcasting headquarters are in Birmingham but it has offices and a broadcast studio in London too. It is

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.unitedsikhs.org/mission.php> (retrieved on 2 January 2016)

<sup>5</sup>(retrieved on 2 January 2016)

<sup>6</sup><http://www.sikhpolice.org/>(retrieved on 2 January 2016)

aimed at the whole (or at least, much) of the Sikh diaspora. It broadcasts across Europe on satellite television, in Canada and more recently, in India. ‘Programming is featured in English and Punjabi languages with advice shows dealing with health, social, legal and community matters. Sikh Channel caters for all generations, genders and viewpoints making it the ultimate *People’s Channel*’.<sup>7</sup>It boasts 4.5 million viewers throughout the world and over 800,000 Facebook fans. (Interview conducted with Gurdeep Singh on February 12<sup>th</sup> 2015)

- The Anglo-Sikh Heritage Trail, founded in 2004, seeks to highlight ‘the shared heritage between the Sikhs and Britain’. It receives English Heritage and Heritage Lottery funding. Its motto is ‘Preserving the Past, Inspiring the Future’. ASHT helps towards organizing (or organizes in its own name) lectures, exhibitions or workshops on the shared heritage between Sikhs and Britain.<sup>8</sup>(Interview conducted with Harbinder Singh on February 19<sup>th</sup> 2015)

- The Sikh Women’s Alliance is an East-London based women’s group set up in October 2003 following a conference held in April 2002 at Docklands Campus (University of East London) attended by people from many Sikh Organizations. Since then it has grown from 5 to its present membership of hundreds of women who actively participate in social events and educational conferences. Sikh Women’s Alliance defines itself as ‘a non-religious, non-political group to empower, inspire and inform Sikh women to join the mainstream of UK society’.<sup>9</sup> Among many other aims it means to enhance access to employment, education, and work skills for Sikh women living in Greater London. It also promotes partnership working on projects with the aim of empowering the Sikh women through capacity building and multi-cultural events. (Interview conducted with Balvinder Kaur Saund on February 20<sup>th</sup> 2015).

- British Armed Forces Sikh Association (BAFSA): created in 2010, it is the ‘official UK Armed Forces organization acting as a focal point for serving Sikhs and their community within the Ministry of Defense’. As stated on its Facebook page, its aim is to ‘support Sikh service personnel’, to ‘advise in equality and diversity issues’, ‘to promote civil military interaction’ and to ‘preserve and promote Sikh British military history’.<sup>10</sup>(Interview conducted on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2015).

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.sikhchannel.tv/what-we-do/> (retrieved on 2 January 2016)

<sup>8</sup><http://asht.info/> (retrieved on 2 January 2016)

<sup>9</sup><http://sikhwomensalliance.com/> (retrieved on 2 January 2016)

<sup>10</sup><https://www.facebook.com/BritishArmedForcesSikhAssociation/>(retrieved on 2 January 2016)

- English Sikhs was founded in 1995 as an international policy think tank. Although the association has now entered its final transformation into a web-based signposting service in readiness for the introduction of the Sikh Intranet and Extranet. Its 'principal advisor', Harmander Singh, is a key UK Sikh figure, with a wealth of corporate strategy/policy making experience in the public and voluntary sector behind him. Harmander Singh sits on the boards of or indeed chairs a number of community organization and is a member of the BBC Standing Conference on Religion and Belief.<sup>11</sup> (Interview conducted with Harmander Singh on May 12<sup>th</sup> 2015).

- Ekta Project Newham was launched in 1986. Its aim is 'to bring together groups of isolated, mildly confused, frail, disable and household Asian older people living in Newham and surrounding boroughs and to improve their quality of life through community action, campaigning, advocacy, social and health care.'<sup>12</sup> (Interview conducted on May 13<sup>th</sup> 2015)

- City Sikhs Network was founded in 2011 in London. It defines itself as 'an organization run by Sikh professionals to create positive change within society and to help create a more connected world.' The association claims to be based 'on universal Sikh values such as equality, tolerance, social integration' and, interestingly, 'community cohesion', a concept imported from Canada by the Cantle commission in 2001. The organization boasts over 6,000 members throughout the UK (in London, the South East as well as the Midlands), chiefly, as its name suggests 'Sikh professionals from the second, third and fourth generation British Sikh community'. On its website, the association puts forward the presence of its 'directors' in the mainstream local, national or international media (BBC1, BBC World News, BBC Asian Network, local BBC Radio, BBC Radio 2, Al Jazeera, Channel 4, Huffington Post). In 2015, the association launched a branch in India, with the aim of 'building a strong link between the Anglo and Indian professional Sikh communities'.<sup>13</sup> (Interview conducted on May 14<sup>th</sup> 2015)

- Sikh Sewak (Sikh Chaplaincy) was set up at the start of 2005, as an independent organization to help support the delivery of chaplaincy services for the Sikh community. The UK Sikh Healthcare chaplaincy group was formed. It now is a registered charity operating from its London head offices. The charity trustees are from a wide range of backgrounds but

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<sup>11</sup> <http://healthwatchredbridge.co.uk/content/meet-team> (retrieved on 2 January 2016)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.ektaproject.org.uk/> (retrieved on 2 January 2016)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.citysikhs.org.uk/> (retrieved on 2 January 2016)

all are either trained or current volunteers associated with chaplaincy services.<sup>14</sup>(Interview conducted with Parminder Kaur Kondralon May 15<sup>th</sup> 2015)

The Sikh Channel, Sikh Police, City Sikhs Network, have quickly expanded from the national to the international level trying to reach the Sikh Diaspora. The interviews investigated the community spokespersons' motivations, their goals but also the main challenges they face in their relation with the government officials, as well as with other ethnic minority organizations. All the interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

In addition to these interviews, twenty-six individual questionnaires were filled on a face-to-face basis in the Greater London Area, particularly in neighborhoods with a high density of Sikhs, such as Shepherd's Bush, Southall, Ealing, Ilford and Brent.

## **The specific nature of the security challenges faced by Sikhs**

### **Objective dimension**

Concerning the objective security challenges faced by British Sikhs, one could identify two different elements. On the one hand, a historical element linked to the diasporic dimension of Sikhs, namely the impact of the Golden Temple massacre in 1984 and the ensuing anti-Sikh unrest in India, which some Sikhs call a 'pogrom' or indeed, a 'genocide'.<sup>15</sup> The intervention of the Indian army in the Golden Temple, where Sikh separatists has sought refuge, officially claimed the lives of 375 security staff and Sikh militants, although a British Foreign Office report declassified in May 2014 suggests it may have been as many as 3,000, including those of ordinary Sikh pilgrims. It also indicates that the Thatcher government advised the Indian government on when and how to carry out the raid.<sup>16</sup> This episode led to the subsequent assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, as noted by Singh & Singh Tatla.<sup>17</sup> This has an impact on the perception of Sikhs in India, who were then considered a clear security threat but also, to a lesser extent, in Britain, as clashes between Sikhs and Hindus were feared. The declassification of Cabinet archives in 2014 revealed that the Thatcher government underwent pressure from the Indian government to ban a march

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<sup>14</sup><http://www.sikhchaplaincy.org.uk/index.php/about-us> (retrieved on 2 January 2016)

<sup>15</sup> « Amritsar 'genocide' commemoration: Sikhs march through London », BBC News, 8 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-27751455> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>16</sup> « Golden Temple attack: UK advised India but impact 'limited' », BBC News, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-26027631> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>17</sup>Singh & Singh Tatla, p. 24



organized by British Sikhs and that Sikhs were briefly perceived as a threat, as suggested in the following statement by Gurmel Singh, Secretary general of the Sikh Council UK:

It appears this was one in which trade and bilateral relations took priority and this in turn probably led to a situation in which Sikhs in the UK were viewed with suspicion and even as some sort of threat to the UK by the Government of the time [...] We have been told that the Thatcher Government of 1984 was neutral in the whole process but this clearly calls that into question.<sup>18</sup>

Along the same lines, the Sikh Channel spokesman told us:

I mean you may have realized that Margaret Thatcher, at the time of 84, they have recently discovered the letters of Margaret Thatcher and Mrs. Ghandi from the Indian government. That was never published before! The public would have never known had Sikh Channel not actually aired that news.

The Golden Temple raid is celebrated by an annual march in London in June.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, there is a more contemporary element. Since 2001, Sikhs have increasingly been securitized, as underlined by our United Sikhs respondent, e.g.:

[...] after 9/11 the legal environment had changed a lot with new restrictions and the Sikhs were caught heavily in these new restrictions. So our mission as an organization is to explain on the European level how these new law regulations affect us.

Especially controversial have been the airport security checks on turbans that were supposed to come into force in 2011, including for airport employees, as a result of European legislation. Such measures were resisted by various Sikh community organizations, such as the Sikh Federation<sup>20</sup>, which advocated the use of swabs, deemed more acceptable by Sikhs:

“Agenda Item 6 - Protecting the human rights of Sikhs and humanitarian aid”

<sup>18</sup>AmitArora, ‘When Rajiv arm-twisted Thatcher to curb UK Sikhs’, *The Times of India*, 3 January 2015 <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/When-Rajiv-arm-twisted-Thatcher-to-curb-UK-Sikhs/articleshow/45738687.cms> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>19</sup>BhaiAmrik Singh, « Sikhs prepare for annual remembrance march and freedom rally in London », [sikhsangat.com/www.sikhsangat.com/index.php?topic/71796-sikhs-prepare-for-annual-remembrance-march-freedom-rally-in-london-bhai-amrik-singh/](http://sikhsangat.com/www.sikhsangat.com/index.php?topic/71796-sikhs-prepare-for-annual-remembrance-march-freedom-rally-in-london-bhai-amrik-singh/) (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>20</sup>Dil Neiyyar, « Sikhs upset about airport security checks on turbans », *BBC News*, 24 February 2011. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-12558996> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)



- Travel - Ensure the UK Government removes unnecessary travel restrictions and stops harassment at airports and seaports of law-abiding Sikhs wishing to travel to and from the UK regardless of whether they are politically active or not”.

As a result of the well-coordinated community mobilization triggered-off by this affair (which then constituted, according to the Sikh Federation, ‘the most dominant political issue in the Sikh Community’, although it appears there actually were very few cases of Sikhs refusing to be searched. The Home Office Sikh Association, which preceded Sikh Police, one of the associations we investigated, was consulted by the government for devising a strategy on searching turbans at airports.<sup>21</sup> As a result of Sikh lobbying, a solution was found: turbans would be hand-searched only when necessary: hand held metal detectors and Explosive Test Devise (ETD) technology swab testing for chemicals) should be used in most cases instead. This strategy proved successful, in Britain and beyond. Indeed, on 17 December 2012, the UK Department for Transport wrote to Sikh organizations - including the Sikh Federation UK to confirm a new Regulation on Aviation security would be implemented in early 2013: the new regulation makes provisions for Sikh turbans to be searched along British lines, i.e. with due respect to the turban. One of our respondents, Harmander Singh, advised the police in his capacity as chair of *the National Sikh Security Forum* on that issue and showed them why is both offensive and pointless to hand-search a turban:

[...] as an advisor to the Police, the pulsar officers, these are the officers at the airports, I had the opportunity to train 200 of them in one go. [...] the director general was there and I said to him “Are you a Sikh?”, he says “no”. “Do you have any Sikh relatives?” – “No”. It was the same question for all the others. “Have you ever worn a turban?” – “No”. “Do you know what wearing a turban is like?” – “No”. OK. So we have science, we have technology, from satellites; we can see where the minerals are under the ground. Then I asked them, well, why don’t we use that? Sikhs won’t allow anyone to touch their turbans, it’s

<sup>21</sup>Diversity Strategy 2010 - 13 Progress Report 2010 – 2011, Home Office, August 2012. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/98869/diversity-progress-report-201011.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/98869/diversity-progress-report-201011.pdf) (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

like a crown. I said "I'm giving you permission to touch mine". So they touched. I said "Did you feel anything?" he said "No". Why do you do it then? You know? Why is it that you single me out at airports, if you don't know what you're looking for, you don't see anything, and there are other alternatives, why do you do it, other than to challenge my dignity? I said "Now that you have a lesson, that you cannot justify your actions, and it's wasting your time as well as mine, maybe you want to tell your colleagues all across the world."<sup>22</sup>

In January 2013, a British-led delegation of European Sikhs (from the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy) met the European commission official responsible for the implementation of the new turban-search policy, with the aim of ensuring that security checks be properly carried out, along British lines.<sup>23</sup>

The *kirpan*, the ritual sword carried by 'baptized' Sikhs has been controversial, for security reasons, although it is permitted under the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (section 139) and the Offensive Weapons Act 1996 (section 3 and 4). Both of them guarantee the rights of Sikhs to carry the *kirpan*, as British legislation recognizes it as a necessary part of their religion.

Since 9/11, the *kirpan* has been especially controversial among British airline pilots, as Sikh ground workers, including security personnel, are entitled to carry their ceremonial dagger while on duty.<sup>24</sup>

The *kirpan* has often been problematic in some schools, which have banned it, leading to the exclusion of a few schoolboys (e.g. Crompton School, Barnet, North London, 2009). In 2010, however, Sir Mota Singh QC (a Sikh judge, incidentally) defended the right of Sikhs to wear the five inch Kirpan blades in public, 'amid a growing revolt against a perceived clampdown on religious freedom in schools.'<sup>25</sup>

Some schools however allow it, trying to strike a fair balance between Sikh's religious rights and understandably, post 9/11 and 7/7 security imperatives, especially as the question of knife

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Harmander Singh, principal adviser of the Sikhs in England, 13 May 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Daljeet Singh, « Sikh delegation meet European commission staff responsible for policy on research of Sikh turbans at Airport », *Sikh Siyasat News*, January 24, 2013 (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>24</sup> Alastair Jamieson, « Pilots' fury as ground workers allowed to carry knives », *The Scotsman*, 29 July 2002, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/uk/pilots-fury-as-ground-workers-allowed-to-carry-knives-1-614559> (retrieved on 7 January 2016)

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Moore, Sikh 'Ceremonial daggers' should be allowed in schools, says judge", *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 Feb 2010 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/7189675/Sikh-ceremonial-daggers-should-be-allowed-in-schools-says-judge.html> (retrieved on 7 January 2016)

crime in schools has been high on the British government's agenda for the past decade. So-called 'baptized' Sikh schoolboys have been permitted to carry *kirpans* under certain circumstances in certain schools, according to a well-established procedure based on the recommendations of the Equality and Human Rights Commissions and of the Network of Sikh Organizations, the maximum allowed being an 8-inch *kirpan* (blade inclusive).<sup>26</sup> In the schools where they are allowed, some parents have shown concern, which both education professionals and representatives of the Sikh faith have tried to alleviate, as shown below:

Jane Shipperton is from Bedford's Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) who has just issued the new guidance to schools in the town. She told Heart what the *kirpan* symbolizes: « We have never had any reaction from parents in the past. We are satisfied that we have issued very good advice and Sikhs do not see the *kirpan* as a dagger or an offensive weapon. Many Sikhs who are baptized are already wearing the *kirpan* in school and nobody is aware of it because it is well and truly covered and wrapped up. » Tirath Singh Bhavra - from the Sikh community in Bedford - told Heart: « It's a blunt blade, it's not a sharp blade, it's very small. It's not something that could harm. And it's only a minority of the baptized Sikhs that would be going to school with it. » He's confident children won't be using them as a weapon: « I think it's just a fear, that it is a blade and it's like a knife. It's not a blade, it's not a knife, it is a blessing».<sup>27</sup>

The lack of awareness of Sikhism has been a source of challenge for Sikhs in the West, notably in Britain, where bigots and racists have often mistaken them for Muslims.

## Mistaken identity

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and more recently the 7/7 London and 2015 Paris attacks, there was a massive surge in hate crimes against Muslims. Undeniably out of sheer ignorance and hate, members of the Sikh community have been mistaken for Muslims. Indeed, the first victim of this anti Muslim backlash is a Sikh, Balbir Singh Sodhi, shot and killed in Arizona, USA<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> « The Sikh Kirpan: guidance on allowing it in schools », School Leaders Portal, <https://schoolleaders.thekeysupport.com/administration-and-management/ethos-equality/the-sikh-kirpan-guidance-on-allowing-it-in-schools> (retrieved on 7 January 2016)

<sup>27</sup> Ashleigh Carroll, « Sikh students wearing daggers at school », Heart Bedford News, 19 November 2010, <http://www.heart.co.uk/bedford/news/local/sikh-students-wearing-daggers-school/#pIdVbQ6fl6XtH31F.97> (retrieved on 7 January 2016)

<sup>28</sup> For the sake of geographical coherence this paragraph will focus on Sikh attacks in the UK. US 9/11 Revenge Killer Convicted, BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3154170.stm> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

Alongside the framing of anti-terrorist policies, the British governments helped to finance and encourage the collection of data concerning anti-Muslim attacks. The Conservative government, in 2012 introduced a plan to tackle hate crime, namely ‘Challenge it, Report it, Stop it’. In October 2015 the Department for Communities and Local Government announced that anti-Muslim hate crime would be monitored as a separate category across all police forces, just like the anti-Semitic hate crime monitoring. This question is becoming a central one in the upcoming local election campaign: Labour MP for Tooting, Sadiq Khan said, “ Some crimes where Sikhs are targeted are wrongly recorded by the police as Islamophobic incidents due to mistaken identity. If I’m the mayor I will make sure crimes against Sikhs are properly reported as hate crimes”.<sup>29</sup>

Lord Singh speaking in the name of the Network of Sikh Organizations expressed his concern on the invisibility of anti-Sikh hate crimes recorded incorrectly as Islamophobic offences: “The Minister will be aware of numerous attacks on Sikhs as a result of mistaken identity. While hate crimes against the Muslim community have been monitored by every police force in the country, not a single penny is being spent on monitoring hate crimes against Sikhs.”<sup>30</sup> This criticism concerning the lack of finance echoes what the spokespersons of associations interviewed expressed. The omnipresence of a parallel with the Muslim community, under the spotlights since 2001, leads to the same fear of invisibility, both in terms of positive and negative ethno-religious recognition, as will be discussed further in the chapter.

The following succinct and informal press review lists the main attacks against individual Sikhs or Sikh interest perpetrated in Britain due to the mistaken identification of Sikhs as Muslims after the 7/7 London attacks and the two Paris attacks of 2015:

- Following the London bombs of 7/7, the first Gurdwara to be attacked in the UK was Bexley Gurdwara Belvedere, Kent on 7 July 2005<sup>31</sup>. Two bottles containing an accelerant were thrown through the windows of the Gurdwara.<sup>32</sup>
- On 8 July 2005, another Gurdwara was attacked in Bradford: that Sikh temple was mistaken for a Muslim place of worship.<sup>33</sup>
- On 4 August 2005, a 33-year-old Sikh man had his turban pulled from his head by two white men, who also racially abused the man who was walking down a street with his father and brother in Rushden, Northants.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Hardeep Singh “UK Sikhs remain invisible victims of anti-Muslim hate crime”, *International Business Times*, 13 July 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/uk-sikhs-remain-invisible-victims-anti-muslim-hate-crime-1510588> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>30</sup>Hardeep Singh, “Government fails to take anti-Sikh hate crime seriously”, Network of Sikh Organizations (NSO) December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://nsouk.co.uk/tag/hate-crime/> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>31</sup> Sikh United, Minutes of the Meeting between the Sikh community and the Metropolitan Police (MPS), 12 July 2005 (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>32</sup> Institute of Race Relations, [www.irr.org.uk/pdf/all\\_racial\\_violence\\_4.doc](http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf/all_racial_violence_4.doc) (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>33</sup> Sikhs meet police after attacks, BBC News, 12 July 2005, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/4674883.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4674883.stm) (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>34</sup>Institute of Race Relations, <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/the-racist-backlash-goes-on/> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

- On 16 August 2005, a 25-year-old Sikh man suffered stab wounds after being abducted from a Peterborough street by four men wearing balaclavas, which tied him up and attacked him.<sup>35</sup>
- After losing his Gloucester seat in the 2010 general election, Parmjit Dhanda (Labour Party), the first Sikh ever to have served as government minister in the UK (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government), wrote a book, *My Political Race*. In the first pages, he describes how he has often been believed to be a Muslim, and how after he lost his parliamentary seat, a pig's head was dumped outside his house.<sup>36</sup>
- A 45-year-old man who attacked a Sikh shopkeeper in Burnley in 2013, trying to stab him with a kitchen knife while shouting racist abuse, admitted attempted murder in January 2014.<sup>37</sup>
- On 14 January 2015, Zack Davies, 26, said that he had tried to behead Dr Sarandev Bhabra, a Sikh dentist, in revenge for the death of drummer Lee Rigby, killed by Islamist extremists on 22 May 2013.<sup>38</sup>
- In April 2015, the central Gurdwara in Glasgow was vandalized, with Islamophobic graffiti and Nazi swastika painted on its walls.<sup>39</sup>
- On September 2015 a Gurdwara on Allensway, Thornaby (North Yorkshire) was vandalized and graffiti “ Die Muslims, die” was sprayed on the Gurdwara's wall.<sup>40</sup>

## Britain's Sikhs: spared by direct securitization challenges

### A high level of trust towards British institutions

Being a well and long-established community in Britain, the Sikhs consider that they have a strong and a special historical link with the UK. They also consider that the British are aware of this special contribution, particularly in relation to both world wars. This was underlined by several of the community leaders / spokespersons we interviewed, regardless of the nature and orientation of their association. This was notably the case of Harbinder Singh, Chair of the Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail, who suggested that the rights granted to Sikhs in the post-war

<sup>35</sup> Institute of Race Relations, <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/the-racist-backlash-goes-on/> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>36</sup> Book Review; My political Race by Parmjit Dhanda, Jane Merrick, *The Independent*, Sunday 4 April 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/my-political-race-by-parmjit-dhanda-book-review-parliamentary-prejudice-10154613.html> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>37</sup> Spotlight on racial violence: January –March 2014, Institute of Race Relation, <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/spotlight-on-racial-violence-january-march-2014/> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>38</sup> *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/25/zack-davies-racist-guilty-attempted-murder-dentist> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>39</sup> Tristan Stewart-Robertson, “Glasgow Sikh Gurdwara remains defiant after attack with sick Islamophobic graffiti and Nazi swastika” *Daily Record*, 13 April 2015. <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/local-news/glasgow-sikh-gurdwara-remains-defiant-5512593> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

<sup>40</sup> *Daily Sikhs Update*, 3 September 2015, <http://dailysikhupdates.com/racist-attack-on-gurdwara-sahib-in-the-uk-with-graffiti/> (retrieved on 6 January 2016)

period in Britain were determined by their contribution to Britain's military forces in the two world wars:

We didn't come in here in the middle of the night hiding in a boat, we came here because you took our kingdom as a result of that we were part of the British kingdom as a result of that we fought in the two World Wars and, in recognition of that, you gave us the right to settle.

This was also underlined by the president of Sikh Women's Alliance:

The government officials see us as the quiet child, the loyal community who fought the First World War, the Second World War, and they say, "they're able to look after themselves, so just ignore them".

The high level of trust expressed by Sikhs towards the government and by the British democratic and electoral process was another notable finding. This was reflected in the interviews but also in the questionnaires. The spokesperson of Sikh United thus said:

Our objective is to protect the Rights of Sikhs in Britain and in the world even though in Britain there is hardly anything to change.

The spokesperson of the Sikh Channel mentioned the way British schools contribute positively:

We're well integrated here in the UK, that doesn't happen anywhere else in Europe. (...) In the UK kids are taught at school to go to temples and learn about them; they can tell the difference in England between a Sikh and a Muslim. Europeans cannot because they are not taught.

85% of our questionnaire respondents vote whenever there is an election, 58% answered that it is not very important to have Sikh representatives, as against 27%, who answered that it was fairly important to have Sikh representatives. Interviewees therefore indicated a high level of trust in the ability of British politicians to defend their interest even if they are not Sikh themselves:

Most of our respondents do emphasize that they would not enjoy a similar treatment anywhere else in Europe or indeed, in the world. Interviewees compared British laws and government policies more favourably than those of the French government, whose *laïcité* policy in general and the 2004 law banning religious signs in schools in particular are resented:



France would rather have naked women running around rather than humans having their hair covered [...] I did the Paris marathon twice. I refuse to run in Paris again, or France generally. Why should I spend my money in a country that doesn't even like me? I've advocated a ban...everyone else ought to do a ban against any French goods. Anybody who's religious, they shouldn't buy anything French. Maybe when we start hitting [their] pockets [they] will understand.

Despite this high level of trust, community leaders think that on the whole they do not receive the necessary attention from the government and that compared to other communities, they are treated less favorably, especially as regards public funding, and specific public policies. This is very clearly stated by Tariq Modood: "If a group has bad press or is seen as likely to drag you down in terms of your social status or the way you are perceived by the rest of society then you want to distance yourself from that group [...] At the moment, Muslims are certainly playing that role for South Asians."<sup>41</sup>

One recurring complaint by association leaders was the invisibility of Sikhs. Even though the Sikhs were legally recognized as a distinctive ethnic group by a ground-breaking House of Lords ruling (*Mandla Vs Dowell Lee*) in 1983, the British government seems reluctant to add a 'Sikh' ethnic box to the census in addition to the existing religious one. Yet the specific context of the anti-terrorist legislation in the last 15 years and the over-focalization on the Muslim community is going to exacerbate different and sometimes paradoxical strategies among the Sikh community that will be explored in the following paragraph.

## **Securitization as a Paradoxical tool for Sikh assertiveness and community Construction**

### **Ethnic census**

The largest Sikh community outside India lives in the UK, with 432,429 Sikhs (423,158 in England and Wales alone) in 2011. A majority of Sikhs consider themselves as British Sikhs. The absence of a distinct ethnic category in the national census was highlighted by those interviewed as one of the main problems of the Sikh community in Britain today. Sikhs are

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<sup>41</sup>Tariq Modood, cited in Shivani Nagarajah, 'Mistaken Identity', *The Guardian*, 5 September 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/sep/05/religion.july7> cited in Sian, *op.cit.* p. 7



expected to tick the Indian box. Yet there are two residual issues. First, many were not born in India and don't consider themselves as Indian. Second, the historical enmities between the Sikhs and the Indian government add symbolic significance to their place of birth. Others were born in Britain and want the category 'British Sikhs' created in order to obtain specific consideration for their needs by policy makers, which is distinct from a simple 'Sikh' religious box, as is the case currently. Despite their persistent lobbying, Sikhs appeared in the last national census as a religion and not as an ethnic group. The comparisons between the 2001 and 2011 religious question shows an increase in the number of Sikhs in the UK: In 2001, 334 419 people identified as Sikhs (0.5% of the population) compared to 423,000 in 2011 (0.8%). That increase may be explained by the fact that Sikhs have increasingly tended to define themselves as Sikhs in the decade between 2001-2011 marked by a growing hostility against Muslims. That Sikhs have become more assertive in order to differentiate themselves from Muslims seems, in the light of the field study, to be one of the reasons for that substantial increase. In the context of securitization the Sikh community finds it "... hard to combine solidarity with a statement of difference". This statement of the spokesperson of Sikh United, illustrates perfectly the limits and the difficulties the Sikhs are caught up in the current counter-terrorism context: on the one hand they are, as a minority ethnic group well aware of the discursive power of "othering" and its negative charges including stereotyping and discrimination. Yet on the other hand they feel the urge, and it is even possible to say that they seize the opportunity, to distance themselves from the Muslim community. By so doing they exploit the British multicultural framework to lodge their claims, specifically the recognition of the Sikhs not only as a religious group but also as an ethnic group, which has been a legal reality since 1983, paving the way for ensuing ethnic monitoring, and as we have seen earlier introducing specific monitoring for Sikh hate crimes.

### **Muslim identity versus Sikh Identity**

Out of the eleven organizations investigated, seven were founded after 9/11, four of which after 7/7. Whether that is in itself indicative of a correlation between the creation of these associations and the shift towards intensified counter-terrorism policies (e.g. launch of CONTEST in 2003 and of PREVENT in 2007) is hard to state. Nonetheless it can already be noted that one of the above-mentioned respondents, Harmander Singh, founded the National Sikh Security Forum, formed soon after 9/11, 'in response to the then growing attacks on

Sikhs and Sikh interests in the UK<sup>42</sup>. The fieldwork data seems to suggest that since 2001, Sikhs have essentially become indirectly engulfed in the post 9/11 debate over security and counter-terrorism, notably owing to their ‘mistaken identity’, a recurring element in our respondents’ answers.

In most interviews, the parallel with Britain’s Muslims was either explicitly discussed or implicitly acknowledged. Most of the associations we investigated (7 out of 11) are relatively new, in contrast with the long-established presence of Sikhs in Britain. Indeed, over the past decade, there does seem to have been a new desire and a new need to express a distinctive Sikh voice amidst Britain’s ethnic minorities, which may be analyzed in terms of the preponderant attention devoted to the Muslim community in post 9/11 and 7/7 Britain. Indeed, among our respondents there clearly is the belief that Sikhs’ political claims have been overshadowed by the over-focalization on Muslims as a risk community since 2001.

That Sikh identity is a mistaken one and that Sikhs found themselves marginalized *vis-à-vis* Muslims after 9/11 is very obvious according to all respondents, as shown in the statements below, respectively by the Sikh Police, United Sikhs and Sikh Missionary Society spokespersons:

After 9/11 there were male victims, because there was a spike in the amount of racial attacks against Sikhs that were thought to be Muslims and they were attacked, even Gurdwaras our religious churches came under attack and once again the police didn’t have any comprehension on how to deal with them.

Another challenge is to raise awareness in Europe about the Sikh community and make a distinction between the Sikh identity and Islam. Because a problem has risen since the 9/ 11 terrorist attacks. It’s hard to put it, and to try to combine solidarity with a statement of difference. So that’s why it is important for us to raise awareness of the Sikh identity.

Creating a Sikh awareness identity is the real challenge to the Sikh today. We are different from Muslims we don’t have any agenda [...] the public might see us as a threat that’s why we need to make publicity to state our difference and see our identity recognized

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<sup>42</sup> Katy P. Sian, *Unsettling Sikh and Muslim Conflict: Mistaken Identities, Forced Conversions, and Postcolonial Formations*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013, p. 92

This seems to be compounded by the successful socio-economic integration of Sikhs, which in their view, means that the government does not pay enough attention to them, as illustrated by the following quote, from our interview with the Sikh Police spokesman:

I think the government; by and large ignores the Sikh community, the reason why I say that is because the Sikh community is not a problem community. Problem community would be the Islamic community and I'll be giving the evidence for that, because Sikhs whether it be their values or for whatever reason are generally hard working community, one the most prosperous communities, here in GB, very low levels of criminality, almost insignificant amounts. [...] Sikhs have thrived in the west, becoming entrepreneurs and business people and that's just generally the only thing that matters to them now, not the practice of the faith [...] so because of those reasons the Sikhs can effectively be ignored by government institutions, because they are not problem community. If they ask for something they generally won't get it because funding is only funding communities that cause issues. Because the Sikh community doesn't cause issues, all of their issues that require addressing by the government are ignored.

Some of our respondents put things even more bluntly. This was evident in the case of the spokeswoman of Women Sikh Alliance: "Because we are not what you call 'the squeaky wheel,' we don't get oiled. People who make noise, they get funding for this and that. But we're the quiet child."

The next point shall analyze the reasons for the nature of the Sikhs' responses to securitization-related challenges.

### **The explanation for their responses**

Despite the distinctive signs of religious affiliation displayed by many of them (the '5 Ks', plus the turban) Sikhs are perceived as different but not as antagonistic. This may be explained by the much-vaunted (and possibly overstated) 'Anglo-Sikh link', to quote Singh and Singh Tatla, or by what Katy Pal Sian describes as the 'conscious embrace of Britishness' by these 'model citizens', characterized by their 'laid-back attitudes towards religion / culture within the UK'. In her view, Sikhs have become an increasingly 'ethnically unmarked

community'<sup>43</sup> or to use an expression coined by Hesse and Sayid, 'a legitimate, de-ethnicized part of the national majority'.<sup>44</sup> In that sense, the Sikh turban may be viewed as a slightly eccentric garment that has become as much part of the national clothing landscape as the Scottish kilt, for example. The assimilation of Sikhs into the mainstream of British society and the dilution of their 'otherness' have also been helped by the 'apparent erosion [...] of the colour line'<sup>45</sup>, which used to lead to or indeed to exacerbate the 'othering' of non-white people, including South-Asians. The assimilation of Sikhs into the mainstream of British society and the comparatively enviable socio-economic position they occupy within it may explain why they have not necessarily sought to mobilize as a distinct political constituency and to have more MPs elected in recent years. Significantly, the only Sikh member of the House of Commons in the previous Parliament was a clean-shaven, un-turbaned Sikh, who had a Christian first name and dropped 'Singh', using only his middle name (Paul Uppal). The lack of elected Sikh representatives, though deplored by certain of our respondents, is consistent with the high level of trust our interviewees showed towards the British government and / or British multiculturalism. Here are two striking illustrations of that: "Our objectives is to protect the Rights of Sikhs in Britain and in the world even though in Britain there is hardly anything to change" (United Sikhs); "We're well integrated here in the UK, that doesn't happen anywhere else in Europe. The reason for that is England has a link with the British Raj in India, which plays a very big part." (Sikh Channel).

For comparatively less successful communities, such as Muslims (who currently have 13 MPs in the House of Commons, eight of whom, women) the question of political representation certainly is more crucial.

A sign of their assimilation is that in our sample, in 2015, a year that saw the Conservatives increase their majority, enabling them to govern the country in their own, majoritarian terms, Sikhs tended to vote like the mainstream of British society, with more support for the Conservatives (38%) than for Labour (23%), with a substantial minority (11%) voting for Nigel Farage's populist UKIP, 3.8% for the Green Party and 7.6% for the Lib-Dems (15.38% did not answer that specific question). That Sikhs supported more Labour than the Conservatives was also established by a national survey: 49% Vs. 41%, a result to be

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<sup>43</sup> Sian, p.42

<sup>44</sup> Hesse, B. and S. Sayyid, 2006, « The Postcolonial political and the immigrant imaginary » in *A Post Colonial People: South Asians in Britain*, ed. N. Ali, V. Kalra and S. Sayyid, 13-32, London: Hurst and Company, cited in Sian p.42

<sup>45</sup>Sian p. 45

contrasted with that for Muslims, who continue to massively support Labour (65%, as against a mere 25% for the Conservatives).<sup>46</sup>

All this means that Sikh culture and specificities have somehow been diluted in the UK, all the more so as Sikhs mobilized for the recognition of their cultural and religious specificities much earlier than any other non-white ethnic community in Britain, including Muslims. The fact that the first turban campaign started in the late 1950s and that Sikhs were recognized both as a religious and ethnic group as early as 1983, means that their claims have been eclipsed by those of groups that might be said to form underclasses, namely African-Caribbeans in the early and mid 1980s and Muslims since the Rushdie Affair (1989) and indeed since 9/11. Since then, the voice of the Sikhs has hardly been audible, all the more so as they have been unable to mobilize along ethnic lines, due to their above-described assimilation into the mainstream of British society, obviously, but also due to their apparently insurmountable divisions, unanimously underlined by our respondents, as shown in the following examples:

I can't see the Sikhs being under one banner" (Sikh Channel);  
"I'm sure you've come across many Sikhs who have said that getting Sikhs together is very much like herding cats. we all have very good ideas but getting people together collectively around the table, and making decisions and then acting upon them is quite another story." (BAFSA). "Everyone believes they're a leader in our community – all the Sikh men think they're the lions in the jungle" (Sikh Women's Alliance).

An aggravating factor has been their limited numbers. The leader of the Sikh Women's Alliance, who unsuccessfully stood for a general election as a Labour candidate told us that no Labour Sikh candidate can be elected if standing against a Muslim candidate sponsored by the Conservatives (or in certain constituencies, by the Liberal-Democrats), given the demographic and therefore, electoral weight of Muslims.

In order to fight these various challenges, which have intensified since 9/11 and 7/7, Britain's Sikhs have tried to devise ad hoc strategies. One is openness.

Indeed, some Sikhs seem to multiply the opportunities to be visible and vocal through the creation of new associations, which stretch beyond the limits of the Sikh faith and mean to get

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<sup>46</sup> « New research shows ethnic minority votes increasingly up for grabs », *British Future* Portal, 25 May 2015, : <http://www.britishfuture.org/articles/ethnic-minority-votes-up-for-grabs/> (retrieved on 8 January 2016)

young people politically involved. This strategy is especially defended by the new generations of prosperous British Sikhs, such as City Sikhs, the aim of whom is to mobilize Sikhs along ethnic lines, beyond strictly religious issues, including through making links with like-minded organizations or people outside their ethnic group, including Hindus, Jews or indeed, Muslims. This strategy is explained below by the director of City Sikhs:

We are politically engaged in networks, we organize networking events, encouraging the younger generation to be politically engaged, encouraging them to consider a career as an MP or as a politician, because we have the links with a certain number of different MPs, Labour conservative or liberal democrats, we don't mind of which political color people are, we want to be engaged in the political machine. On the local level there are also ways of engaging, becoming a local councilor these kind of things being involved with society and engaging with society. And also being involved with interfaith work, this is another big strand of thing that we do. The Sikh faith scripture is an interfaith scripture (Muslim, Hindu and Sikh), if our foundation was based on interfaith we should actively engage in interfaith dialogue so we can keep links with other people, and people develop understanding, cultural understanding, mutual friendships and this makes society a better place I think.

Another, more marginal one, is a form of identity fallback, or indeed radicalization, through which certain Sikhs avoid contacts with other groups. Some of our respondents told us that a minority of young Sikhs have tended to become more religious in recent years and that certain Gurdwaras have become less open than before, notably through a rejection of exogamy, as shown in our interview with City Sikhs:

[...] with the liberalization of views in general in society and tendency towards secularism versus some religious point of view [...] we are regressing backwards, for example ten years ago you could have an interfaith marriage in a Sikh temple. Nobody had to convert to Sikhism, but now in 2015, we are seeing people, young people, saying that we don't want those interfaith marriages and [...] are asking temple committees to stop those interfaith marriages. They are stopping people on their wedding day. Can you imagine this... having your wedding blocked?

Such a case came to the forefront of the national news when an inter-faith marriage was vehemently opposed by Sikh radicals in Southall in August 2015.<sup>47</sup>

That trend can be traced back to 2004, three years after 9/11, with the mobilization along fairly radical lines of certain Sikhs to have a theatre play banned, *Behzti* ('dishonour', in Punjabi), frequently referred to as 'the Sikh Rushdie Affair'<sup>48</sup>. The playwright behind *Behzti*, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, a Sikh woman herself, had set the play's action in a Gurdwara, which sheltered rapes, homosexual intercourse between men and eventually a murder, perpetrated by means of a *kirpan*. The representatives of the Council of Sikh Gurdwaras in Birmingham deemed the play blasphemous and insisted on meeting the managers of the Repertory Theatre, where the performance was supposed to be held and expressed their discontent, asking for the action to be set in a Sikh community center instead, which the management refused, calling that a form of censorship. On the opening night, on 18 December 2004, a demonstration took place, regrouping about 400 Sikhs. A group of demonstrators broke into the theatre, where a Christmas pantomime was being played, leading to the evacuation of roughly 800 people, including many families. Three policemen were injured, while three demonstrators were arrested.

The Repertory eventually decided to cancel altogether *Behzti*, while the playwright had to placed under police protection owing to the hate mail she received. Fiona MacTaggart, then a member of the Blair government and Labour MP for Slough refused to criticize the intimidation and the violence displayed by the Sikh militants, on the ground that 'freedom of expression' is part and parcel of the 'British tradition'.<sup>49</sup> Many actors, stage directors and playwrights however supported Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti.<sup>50</sup> Salman Rushdie himself criticized the decision to cancel altogether the play as well as Fiona Mac Taggart's statement, which he deemed reminiscent of the attitude of Labour during the crisis that followed the publication of the *Satanic Verses* (1988) and Khomeini's subsequent fatwa targeting Salma, Rushdie (1989).

<sup>47</sup>Lian Dean, « Racist 'Sikh Taliban' thugs are attacking inter-faith marriage », *Breitbart*, 25 August 2015. <http://www.breitbart.com/london/2015/08/12/racist-sikh-taliban-thugs-are-attacking-inter-faith-marriages/> (retrieved on 8 January 2016)

<sup>48</sup> SINGH & SINGH TATLA, p.138

<sup>49</sup> SINGH & SINGH TATLA, p.140 (traduction de l'auteur)

<sup>50</sup> « Theatre community defends 'courageous' Birmingham Rep », *The Guardian*, Tuesday 21 December 2004, [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2004/dec/21/arts.religion>]



## Conclusion

This chapter has endeavored to depict a truly complex and pluralistic faith and ethnic group and its paradoxical relationship to securitization: though seemingly spared by it superficially, it does seem that the various community assertiveness strategies devised by Britain's Sikhs since 9/11 have been shaped (albeit indirectly, in most cases) by security challenges. The first part of our chapter has shown that Sikhs or Sikh interest have been the indirect victims of hate crime, chiefly as the result of 'mistaken identity', which has often led Islamophobes to attack them. Our Sikh respondents, who are on the whole very well integrated, or indeed arguably, assimilated; agree to say that they face no direct securitization challenges in the UK. They even insist on their high level of trust towards the British government, particularly as regards diversity management. This means that the question of being represented by Sikhs is a secondary or indeed a non-preoccupation for many of our respondents, as they feel their interests are adequately defended by British parliamentary democracy as it is. The only recurring bone of contention stems from the absence of a 'Sikh' ethnic box in the census, which would certainly serve as a starting point to monitor anti-Sikh crime, even if it is carried out by anti-Muslim bigots.

In our third part, we have tried to establish that paradoxically, securitization has also had positive consequences, as it has served as a tool for Sikhs to rethink their assertiveness visibility strategies, which have long been overshadowed by the mobilization of comparatively less successful communities, notably Muslims, who have paradoxically been, in a way, the beneficiaries of the counter-terrorism policies that have targeted them since 9/11 and 7/7, as they have been in a position to be consulted and sometimes listened to by the government, as most of our respondents seem to deplore.

Part four, eventually, has shown that the assimilation and in a way the de-ethnicization of Sikhs, who seem to have merged within the mainstream of British society has led to two opposite strategies. On the one hand, an open one, through which modern associations staffed by successful professionals seek to mobilize Sikhs along ethnic lines, beyond traditional religious criteria, by trying to foster inter-faith dialogue and making links with non-Sikhs. On the other hand, there has been a marginal tendency towards cultural fallback or indeed a certain degree of 'radicalization' (refusal of exogamy or of artistic freedom of expression), which, until now, has remained by and large non-violent.

Every single association leader or spokesperson we have interviewed seemed surprised when we asked them "Do you feel that the government/institutions you deal with tend to view the issues or communities you are concerned under the angle of 'security' or as threats", as if they had never thought about it before:

No, no they (the government) don't see us as a threat, they don't see us at all" (Sikh Missionary Society). "In 2015 definitely not (...) No the Sikhs are not a security issue. I haven't come across any issue that would view Sikhs in 2015 as a security issue, when most of the world is catching up and



realizing that the threat comes, the threat to the west and to civil society comes from the Islamic agenda” (Sikh Police) “Basically they see us as a community that does not pose a security threat in many ways it’s a model for integration”. (Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail) - “The British government does not see the Sikhs through the security lenses” (Sikh United) - “I think within the UK there is no immediate issue that the security agency needs to be concerned with or have ever concerned themselves with” (BAFSA)

Moreover, 80.7% of those who answered the individual questionnaire had never heard about the PREVENT strategy. That Sikhs form a paradoxical community, or rather communities, has been repeated and documented throughout this chapter. The biggest paradox is probably the following. Although Sikh leaders and individuals, as well as statutory agencies claim they have been unaffected by securitization, one cannot but note that most of their discursive, political, organizational or strategic positioning has been framed by it since 2001. Whether this will prove a blessing (redefining their identity in post-multicultural Britain) or a burden (creating radicals or extremists in their midst) remains to be seen.

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