

Identity, Empowerment and Change, Handout 12

We Are Just People

My parents came from Pakistan in the 1960s. My dad first worked in a mill and then as a postal worker until he retired. I consider myself to be a British Muslim but I don't like to be pushed into defining myself; it has a dislocating effect. To some, as a Muslim I am either a fanatical terrorist or a victim of Islam, and I am neither of those; we are just people.

I became politically active within two weeks of the September 11 attacks. I was in Birmingham city centre when this man came up and spat on me. To me, Birmingham was a great place, and I had never experienced any racism or given it a second thought. I began to wonder, where was this all going to lead?

We are living in challenging times. For Muslims it's important to hold a firm and dignified line, between not being reactive to what's happening, but I do think there's injustice. There is a disproportionate response from the government and political ambitions are being put before what is good for humanity.

As Muslims, we have to be confident and not be defensive, we have to be open and not be afraid to say what we feel. Non-Muslims have also to look at why they are living in a climate of fear. I feel my eyes have been opened. I was very passive before. Now I am vice-chair of Respect, the anti-war alliance. In one sense, ignorance is bliss but I couldn't go back to the way I was before 9/11. I would rather live in a better world than the one we do today.

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