

Seminar Report

on

Countering Extremism

10 March 2011

Brick Lane Mosque, 59 Brick Lane
London E1 6QL



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This report was compiled and edited by Jamil Iqbal, Swadhinata Trust with the assistance of Dr Daniel Nilsson Dehanas, Bristol University & Ghaffar Hussain, Quilliam Foundation.

Disclaimer for this report

This report of the seminar aims at reflecting the presentations made, and the views expressed by speakers and other participants, and it does not seek to indicate any conclusive agreement between participants. The report is to be considered the host's summary and it has not been reviewed by the speakers or other participants prior to its publication. Deviations, if any, in the report from actual expressions made at the seminar are incidental and unintentional.

1. Introduction

The Swadhinata Trust in conjunction with the Brick Lane Mosque and with the support of London Borough of Tower Hamlets held a seminar to highlight the impediments in undermining extremist ideology that drives Muslim young people to extremist groups.

In his opening statement the Vice President of Brick Lane Mosque, Sajjad Miah, expressed that he was very pleased to have such a broad range of speakers and participants from the local community at the seminar. He felt that this showed the interest and importance of working together in undermining extremist ideology. Ansar Ahmed Ullah of Swadhinata Trust introduced the three main objectives of the seminar as follows:

1. To discuss how best to counter extremism within Muslim communities and to find strategies to take forward.
2. To support Muslim and non-Muslim community leaders in engaging and empowering young people in challenging and countering religious extremists through a co-ordinated common platform.
3. To make suggestions for building positive relationships to strengthen links with other faith groups and to build up a network of groups and individuals to stand up to religious intolerance and violent extremism.

Ansar Ahmed Ullah also stated that: "The purpose of the conference is to stimulate a forum for discussion of countering extremism by all the parties concerned and to pave the way forward for better cooperation".

The programme of the conference is attached as Annex 1 to this report of the conference.

1. Julie Begum, Chairperson, Swadhinata Trust Opening remarks

This seminar is the final event of a series of events that we've been doing called 'One Tower Hamlets for All' which has been funded by London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The first was Hindu festival Durga Puja that was held at York Hall. The second one was Muslim's Eid Event at Toynbee Hall. The third was a Christmas Event at Christ Church and the fourth was a Holocaust Memorial Event that we attended at Nelson Street Synagogue, and so this has been, for us, a really important piece of work, working with different communities in Tower Hamlets, different faith organisations and this is really I'd say the cherry on the pie. It's when we actually meet and talk together about the difficulties in our community and look at ways of how we can work together at countering extremism.

2. Welcome address by Mr. Sajjad Miah, Vice President, Brick Lane Mosque

Brick Lane Mosque is perhaps the most famous mosque in Britain. It's set in a part of London that's seen continuous change. Before it was a mosque, it was a synagogue. Before it was a synagogue, it was a church. Those who pray at and work for Brick Lane Mosque are contributing to modern Britain, as the Jews and Christians who worshipped in the same building during earlier times did in their day.

These are challenging times but we have excellent relationship with our neighbours. In fact we experienced no animosity or attacks after 9/11 or 7/7. This is perhaps because the mosque is run by people who have grass root connection to this community. Most of our management committee members are community workers and many were involved in the anti- racist movement of the 1970s and the 1980s. We are pleased to host this event in association with the Swadhinata Trust and the Council.

As Brick Lane Mosque is at the heart of the UK's Bengali community, the mosque is in a unique position to play its part in promoting community cohesion amongst the diverse communities of Tower Hamlets. We do hope this is the beginning of a more pro-active engagement with all of you. And as follow up perhaps we could meet in turn at each others faith institutions to continue this dialogue.

3. Summaries of Presentations

In the following sections, topics are given on issues based on short summaries of the individual presentations. Note that while presentations are arranged under some main topics below, many presentations touched on several topics. Individual presentations can be viewed at the conference homepage at [<http://www.swadhinata.org.uk>]

3.1 Contributors Responsible for Radicalisation

Quilliam, as a think tank, aims to challenge extremist narratives while advocating pluralistic, democratic alternatives that are consistent with universal human rights standards. In seeking to achieve this, Quilliam targets numerous audiences: Muslim and non-Muslim, social and governmental, domestic and international.

Ghaffar Hussain in his Keynote presentation addressed four key contributors responsible for an individual's radicalisation: a range of perceived grievances, a crisis of identity, the existence of a legitimising ideology, and the exposure to those who advocate such an ideology. He stated that:

- “The theme I want to touch here is a lot of ‘dual marginalisation’. What I mean by that is, it’s very easy in certain parts to grow up feeling not connected to their parents at home because their parents speak a different language, from a different culture, they don’t feel that connection but they don’t fully feel they belong in wide society either because they don’t feel accepted in wider society.
- You don’t really feel you belong anywhere and you can see if you’re born and raised in that kind of environment it’s very easy to develop an identity crisis very early on because you don’t really know who you are in that sense. So there is a void been created and it’s very easy for extremists to give you an identity.
- I think if you experience the dual marginalisation I spoke about and experience the racism as well, it’s very easy to develop anti-authority, anti-establishment streak very early on, so the police are the bad guys, the teachers are the bad guys, the mosque...the imams are the bad guys, the parents are the bad... everyone in a position of authority telling you what to do is bad. They’re not good people. You don’t like them. You want to rebel against them. So you have that streak and then at the same time you’ve got...and because you have that streak you become more perceptive to local grievances and international grievances.
- What’s happening on the international stage, there’s a conflict zone on what’s happening in your community locally and crucially what extremist recruiters in particular do is actually merge the two and make it into one, make it feel like it’s the same problem. So, the reason why you were attacked by the racist thug is the same reason why the young people are being killed in Iraq. It’s the same thing. It’s all part of one grand narrative, if you like. So it’s the connection of those local and international grievances, is effectively repeating of the very real injustices that exist out there in the world.
- So they’ll [the extremist recruiters] bring along an ideology, which itself has a very particular political narrative and then this political narrative is then used as a prism to understand and comprehend everything that’s going on in the world out there. So you’re given that Islam versus the rest narrative essentially. From a Muslim point of view, it’s like, well, there’s a war against Islam. Muslims are under

siege around the world. Muslims are hated by the West, they will never be happy with us until they either get rid of us or make us change our religion and therefore we must get together and resist these influences. And this narrative is also anti with the Muslims; it's not necessarily always anti non-Muslim. It's anti those Muslims who are not part of the narrative”.

Quilliam Foundation target those who adhere to Islamist narratives and far-right extremist narratives themselves by seeking to undermine their networks, communication strategies and their political ideologies without compromising their civil liberties, and by leveraging the differences that exist between the various factions of Islamism.

3.2 Overview of Preventing Violent Extremism Programme (PVE) in the Borough of Tower Hamlets

Habib Hoque-Habib, Manager of PVE, Tower Hamlets Council, stated the main elements of PVE programme:

- “London Borough of Tower Hamlets in 2008 received a big chunk of money from the government, £1.3 million to deliver various activities about Prevent related initiatives.
- After receipt of the money, we went out to the community; we did huge consultation in October/November 2008. We went after community groups, mosques, churches, synagogues, key stake holders and all the relevant people and we kind of created awareness of the prevalent issues and we asked that what are the initiatives, what the activities they think they are willing to or they are intending to deliver within the Borough of Tower Hamlets to tackle this issue.
- After that groups were invited to apply for funding according to the Prevent-related objectives which are many around tackling violent extremism. After huge consultation we received 82 applications for various funding asking for totally about £5.4 million worth of money to deliver various Prevent-related activities. We didn't have £5.4 million. We had about £1 million for project funding.
- Then a vote consisting of various people within the Tower Hamlet Council and different site, they sat together and then they decided to fund 28 organisations to deliver various activities and those organisations were working with women, young people, some Somali organisations, inter-generational activities, inter-faith activities.

- So funding was elevated according to different categories within the community to tackle the issue. All the projects started delivering from 2009 and now we are into 2011. Out of 28 funded organisations, 10 of them completed their activities in year 2010. Now we have another 14 or so organisations, they are still delivering their activities within their Borough.
- Now, in terms of engagement with the various partners, obviously we have been able to forge or build a very strong relationship with many statutory organisations as well as community organisations.
- To sum up, Prevent obviously as you know, that as it stands finishing in March 2011 and after that nobody knows what's going to happen because this new government is reviewing the whole agenda as we speak and we are expecting a full report sometime in June now, and that will give us a broader direction as to how we work in the future in a diverse borough like Tower Hamlets”.

3.3 Three Elements to Counter Extremism

Simon Keyes, Director, St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace in his presentation argued that extremism is by no means unique to the Muslim community. There are plenty of experiences in society of other people struggling with similar issues and so the issue of extremism cannot be defined just as an Islamic problem. Simon Keyes stated that there are three elements we have to take into account to counter extremism:

- “The first is, for those people who distort our faith or our values for ideological reasons or for their own advantage, we have to engage with them, argue with them and win the arguments. So I need to do that with the Christian fundamentalists and we all need to do that with people we meet who may support, tacitly or otherwise, the incitement of hatred or the use of violence. So first of all we have to engage with and win the arguments with people who distort our values for their own ideological purposes.
- The second thing, we do need to understand and act on the conditions and the cultures in which grievances can actually ferment into isolation or into extremism. We need to think about the circumstances in which individuals can isolate themselves from the rest of society and therefore lose their sense of collective responsibility. We also need to look at the issue of charismatic leaders and the issues to which extremist views can be propagated through the internet, particularly in languages which are non-majority. So we do need to look at the conditions and the culture in which extremism thrives.

- The third thing to say is that the leading on from the fire pits, that we have a common interest in solving this problem, that we must build broad coalitions and the more diverse those coalitions are, the more powerful they will be, and in particular, one of the things we need to do is not to allow the media and people who we come into contact with to generalize that because there are extremists within a particular group, therefore that group is somehow suspect”.

3.4 Prevent Policy and Strategy

Dr. Daniel Nilsson DeHanas, Researcher at Bristol University, in his keynote presentation summarised a few of the potential weaknesses that are seen at a national level regarding the Prevent Agenda. He stated that some of the concerns people raised are that:

- “Prevent has been about a Muslim problem. It’s identified Muslims, no matter what sort of stream or concern of Islam they might have, as a population that is really at risk of extremism, and the easiest way to see this is that the areas which were identified for funding were the areas with the highest proportion of Muslims in those local areas. The difficulty that many people have with this way of going about things and identifying it as a Muslim problem is that it identifies Muslims as a suspect community. It makes it seem as if it’s really the community’s problem rather than being a broader problem.
- Another concern is that Prevent encourages factionalism and sectarianism and some people have said that the PVE Agenda, the Preventing Violent Extremism Agenda, is more like a Provoking Virulent Envy agenda. It’s more a case of making people who are Muslims have sort of intra-Muslim strife and also making people from other groups feel like, “why is there a special pot of money available to Muslims and not available to us?” So that’s one of the major concerns which many people have voiced about this Agenda.
- We’ve already heard about the spying and intelligence gathering concerns which people have been concerned about primarily because there has been a really strong linkage of a sort of community cohesion agenda with a counter-terrorism agenda so that people can never tell if the goal is to bring communities together or it’s actually to get information from them and identify the next potential terrorists”.

Dr. DeHanas in his presentation also mentioned some of the changes the government is taking so the right agendas are delivered by the right people. He stated that:

- “The Home Office and the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) will be splitting and differentiating the roles. The Home Office will be doing counter-terrorism work and the DCLG will be doing community cohesion and integration work.
- Another change which seems likely to happen is that there’s going to be a targeting of all forms of extremism so it won’t just be about the Muslim community but the sort of far right extremism of the English Defence League and others is considered an equally large problem.
- The roles of the inter-faith push within the Prevent Agenda, a strong intra-faith push as well, so thinking about the different rivalries and concerns within groups, and also a stronger push to understand integration and what that means for these different groups [are] these are some concerns which are being thought about at the moment.”

Dr. DeHanas finally reviewed his presentation by providing recommendations for groups interested with the Prevent Agenda in the future. He prioritised five topics to investigate. These are integration, inter-faith, intra-faith, Islamophobia and innovation. He stated that:

- “In terms of integration, the ways forward are mainstream politics and mainstream cultural friendships. Emphasis on integration is probably going to be quite important in the future.
- In terms of inter-faith, we’ve had a really good understanding that Tower Hamlets is a very active area for faith groups and has been for centuries. So it’s an absolutely crucial place for faith groups to work together and that is a very central thrust of the DCLG’s new workings, is that they really want a lot of collaboration rather than isolating between different groups.
- Intra-faith, thinking about the sort of divides and concerns within the community is something which the government has realised through lots of years of working on this agenda. It is often a bigger set of barriers than the inter-faith barriers.
- Islamophobia is something which has really risen to prominence recently, partly due to the far right groups which we’ve mentioned, also due to Baroness Warsi’s speech and an All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia which has been formed which will be investigating that issue and producing reports which will affect Parliament and it’s very important to know that that will have a kind of influence in the next few years. It’s something which people tend to recognize as a real problem that has passed the “dinner table test.” It’s something which

people are able and willing to speak about Muslims in ways that they wouldn't be willing to speak about other groups. So it is going to be something which will be looked at in government but there may also be a backlash against this set of concerns as well and that's worth watching out for.

- Finally, I would like to mention innovation. Simply what I mean by that is that this is a time when there are very severe cuts. Things like arts are really in a fragile place at the moment and the sort of Big Society agenda is very much about people thinking in new ways and being innovative, to be able to keep their volunteerism and their community activities alive. So I think the new government is very, very excited about social enterprise and finding funding from alternative sources and collaborations between groups, and I think a lot of new and creative thinking needs to be done in order to meet that and, of course, also, it's important to keep the government to account on these issues too because these cuts are so deep that it may be unrealistic for this sort of community life to go on. So I think thinking in an innovative way is a very Big Society set of concerns for us to focus on as well".

3.5 Promotion of Interfaith Relations

Three guest speakers from different religious background delivered their speech on tolerance and countering extremism. Leon Silver of East London Central Synagogue talked about the appreciation of the wonderful diversity of Creation and how it can also lead to absolute certainties and then to intolerance of others. He concluded his speech by mentioning that both Jewish and Muslim communities in Tower Hamlets have many similarities including having had to face prejudice from the wider community. We can learn and share our experience from each other.

Fr. Brian Ralph, Vicar, St. Barnabas Parish Church in his speech underlined the importance of promoting good interfaith relations. He highlighted the contribution of faiths to building community and the increasing understanding between faiths and wider society. He spoke of the benefits of engaging young pupil from diverse religious background in inter faith exchanges and activity days (art, music and sports). He emphasised the partnerships across faith communities which are building the greatest positive movements. Positive work on co-existence, compassion and tolerance is done through arts e.g. music, film, theatre and drama. He spoke of his involvement with the Jenin-Tower Hamlets Fellowship, which host a group of people

from the West Bank, village of Jenin, two or three times a year in Tower Hamlets, particularly in Bow. In his concluding remarks he emphasised the need to build a platform where young people feel safe to say what they want and to create forums where we can listen to them.

Dr. Kaviraj Santayana of Sanaton Association, UK in his speech explained the principles of Sanaton Dharma, which means “Eternal or Universal Righteousness”. It is the original name of what is now popularly called Hinduism. Sanaton Dharma comprises of spiritual laws which govern the human existence. Sanaton Dharma is to human life what natural laws are to the physical phenomena. Sanaton Dharma looks upon a person as a part and parcel of the mighty Whole. Sanaton Dharma regards person as a part of the Whole, having the same vital essence as all other human and sub-human creatures of the universe. This cosmic view of Hinduism transcends the sectarian or group dogmas and paves a way for the coexistence of all creatures. The “Universe is One Family.” In his final remark, Dr. Santayana elucidated the Sanaton principles which guide the humankind towards universal harmony through acceptance and tolerance. The potential for human wholeness (or in other frames of reference, enlightenment, salvation, liberation, transformation, blessedness) is present in every human being. No race or religion is superior and no colour or creed is inferior.

3.6 Community Engagement

PC Ian Galloway and PC Ian Kershaw of the Metropolitan Police Prevent Team (MPPT) provided a positive image of its work with community engagement in the borough of Tower Hamlets. MPPT’s aim is to identify and prevent violent extremism and support community cohesion through effective community engagement. Engagement has allowed building trust with different parts of the community. One of its priorities is working with pupils of local Madrasas. PC Ian Kershaw in his concluding remark said, “It is about engaging kids, stopping young people getting involved in criminal activity. End of the day it is about future, it’s helping them in different organisations, ensure these young people have a future and don’t get involved in criminal sides of the world and hope if you are engaged with all our partners, we’re successful about it”.

4. Conclusion

In general terms, the aim of the seminar has been to stimulate thinking on approaches to countering extremism. More specifically, the seminar has sought to provide reflections and recommendations on support for grass root voices.

During the course of the seminar participants discussed and exchanged views on approaches to preventing and countering extremism as well as radicalization. It became apparent that the expertise and willingness required to tackle extremism within the borough does exist.

However, such efforts are at present woefully underfunded and under-resourced. This seminar was vital in identifying areas for co-ordinated action and bringing together partners who could work together to counter extremism more effectively. Such efforts, with the right level of support from local and national government, could significantly hamper extremist activities in the borough and help to promote much needed community cohesion and integration.

We have to continue to reach out further and seek to engage at the grassroots, looking to support work that is both credible to our audiences, and that has a real and lasting positive impact on local areas.

It is stressed to increase access to positive activities which resonate with the needs of youths of the local area. Sports, culture and the arts engage young people in positive and meaningful activities, promoting a sense of social engagement, celebrating diversity, reinforcing shared values and making it clear that there is more that unites communities than divides them.

Annex-1

Seminar Programme

Agenda

Chaired by

Sajjad Miah, Vice-President, Brick Lane Mosque

2.00 pm

Opening-Introduction & welcome address

Sajjad Miah, Vice-President, Brick Lane Mosque

Julie Begum, Chairperson, Swadhinata Trust

Habib Hoque-Habib, Prevent Programme Manager, London Borough of Tower Hamlets

2.15 pm

Multi-faith address-by guest speakers on tolerance

Leon Silver, Honorary Financial Representative, East London Central Synagogue

Fr Brian Ralph, Vicar, St. Barnabas Parish Church & Chaplain – St. Margaret’s House Settlement

Dr Kaviraj Santayana, Sanaton Association

Simon Keyes, Director, St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace

2.30 pm

Keynote address

Ghaffar Hussain, Director of Training and Consultancy, Quilliam Foundation: The factors that drive extremism: a personal journey

Dr Daniel Nilsson DeHanas, Christ Church Spitalfields and School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies, Bristol University: Looking ahead – Prevent policy and strategies

3.00 pm

Q & A & round table discussion

Annex-2 List of Participants

NAME	ORGANISATION
Abdul Shahid	Treasurer, Swadhinata Trust
Alice Sielle	Belief in Bow, St. Barnabas Parish Church
Amir Hussain	Trustee, Brick Lane Mosque
Amir Hussain	Local resident
Ansarul Haque	Collective of Bangladeshi School Governors
Daniel Nilsson DeHanas	Christ Church Spitalfields & School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies, Bristol University
Fokhrul Islam	Swadhinata Trust
Fr Brian Ralph	Vicar, St. Barnabas Parish Church & Chaplain - St Margaret's House Settlement
Ghaffar Hussain	Director of Training and Consultancy, Quilliam Foundation
Habib Hoque-Habib	Prevent Programme Manager, London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Ian Galloway	Met Police Prevent team
Ian Kershaw	Met Police Prevent team
Irshad Ali	Trustee, Brick Lane Mosque
Jamil Iqbal	Secretary, Swadhinata Trust
Julie Begum	Chairperson, Swadhinata Trust
Justine Huxley	St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace
Kaviraj Santayana	Sanaton Association

Leon Silver	Honourary Financial Representative, East London Central Synagogue
Monjur Rahman Nowshad	Swadhinata Trust
Matiar Chowdhury	Journalist
Matthew Pegler	Altyerre Ltd
Mark Gould	Journalist
Md Ashraf Al Khan	Journalist
Motiur Rahman	Trustee, Brick Lane Mosque
Olwen Sisupalan	Rich Mix
Patrick Streeter	Former Cllr
Sajjad Miah	Vice President, Brick Lane Mosque
Sayfur Rahman Shamim	Swadhinata Trust
Shahanaz Begum	Diversity and Equalities Coordinator, Scrutiny & Equalities, London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Simon Keyes	Director, St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace
S M Yousuf Kamali	Trustee, Brick Lane Mosque
Subash Chandra Das	Journalist
Syed Mortuja Ali	Trustee, Brick Lane Mosque
Zakir Khan	Head of Community Affairs Canary Wharf Group plc

Annex 3

Tower Hamlets faith communities

The Tower Hamlets Christian population

Christianity was the first of the world's major religions to take root in Tower Hamlets, and today it has more followers than any other religion in our borough. According to the last census, there are around 76,000 Christians in Tower Hamlets, while population estimates from 2009/2010 put the number closer to 91,000. Because of this, Christianity has had a strong influence in the borough, notably on local festivals, schools, welfare organisations and architecture. Some of London's finest churches are here, fifty having been built since the 1711 government drive to promote Christianity across the country.

There are numerous Christian communities in the borough, from a variety of theological and ethnic backgrounds. Among these are a large number of Black-led churches, as well as Filipino and Vietnamese congregations, significant numbers of Roman Catholics from Eastern Europe and Pentecostal Christians from African countries. Geographically, the proportion of Christian people varies significantly across the borough, from 18% in Spitalfields and Banglatown to 60% in Bow East.

The Bengali Christian Fellowship

The Bengali Christian Fellowship, which dates back to 1978, is centred around Christ Church on Commercial Street. Its members, of whom there are hundreds, live mainly in the East End, but are also drawn from other parts of London. They come from a variety of Christian backgrounds, from Roman Catholic to evangelical groups.

The Fellowship's primary function is to provide Christian fellowship and instruction for Bengali-speaking Christians. Larger meetings are held at Christ Church and smaller ones at Lincoln Road Chapel in Ponders End. Meetings also take place in members' homes for Bible study and prayer. There have been collaborations with Bangla TV & Channel S to produce Christian programmes for Christmas and Easter, and efforts to promote Christian outreach in the Asian community by distributing audio-visual material in Bengali.

Tower Hamlets Muslim community & the Brick Lane Mosque

Tower Hamlets Muslim population

Tower Hamlets is a diverse borough with a rich history of becoming home to successive migrant populations. The current population of the borough is 234,828, and based on the 2001 census results, is around 36% Muslim. The vast majority of Tower Hamlets Muslims (88.5%) are of Bengali origin, although there is a significant Somali community (approximately 7% of our total population). There is also evidence of a growing number of Arab migrants - Algerian, Egyptian and Moroccan - coming to live and work in the borough. Today Tower Hamlets has the largest community of Muslims in the UK, with an estimated 40 mosques and Islamic cultural centres to serve this community.

The Bengali Muslim population

According to the 2001 census, there are 350,000 people of Bengali origin living in the UK, the largest community outside of Bangladesh. 92% are Muslim, and just over half live in London, with the largest community in Tower Hamlets. Since the 1970s a settled Bengali Muslim community has developed in Brick Lane and the surrounding area - Banglatown. Members of this community have formed thriving cultural, political, media and religious associations, and found success in business and politics.

Tower Hamlets Hindu community & the Sanaton Association

The Hindu community in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets is proportionally one of the smallest in London. Within the borough Hindu people are geographically dispersed. The majority of Hindus in the borough come from Bangladesh. A smaller number of Hindus come from Pakistan, India and elsewhere.

The number of Hindus in the borough appears to be increasing as a result of increased migration. Data on the borough's Hindu population is limited but it is thought to be 0.8% of borough's population.

The Bengali community estimates (numbering about 4,500) of Hindus in Tower Hamlets. The Sanaton Association was established in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in 1983 to support the social, cultural, educational and welfare needs of the Bengali Hindu Community. It plays an important part in celebrating the Bengali New Year, the Hindu Spring, Winter and Autumn festivals and cultural events, which are mainly organised at York Hall, Toynbee Hall and other community centres in the borough. The Sanaton Association also offers supplementary education to children.

Tower Hamlets Jewish population

There has been Jewish population in London since the eleventh century, despite The Edict of Expulsion of 1290 by King Edward I, which resulted in the expulsion of Jews from England until its repeal by Oliver Cromwell in 1656. Many of the early Jewish settlers came from Holland, and were Sephardic in origin (originally from Spain and Portugal).

However it was from 1881 that the rate of migration of Jewish people to the East End increased significantly, following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II which sparked pogroms (state sponsored violence against Jewish communities) in Russia which then spread to Eastern Europe. Many of the new arrivals from Russia and East European countries settled in Tower Hamlets, as they came by boat which made port in the Docks of London.

Between 1881 and the First World War in 1914, 100,000 Jews had settled in the East End of London – which became the most densely populated Jewish community in Europe. The community settled in Aldgate, Commercial Street and eastwards past Brick Lane into Commercial Road, Mile End, Bethnal Green as well as Cable Street. Many of the shops and markets were Jewish. There were over 200 synagogues.

Many more Jews arrived in the 1930s as refugees from the Nazis, by which time the East End Jewish population numbered almost 200,000. However, after the War many Jews moved to North London and Essex to escape the homelessness resulting from the bombing in the East End and also because the community became more affluent. Today there are just less than 1,500 Jews in all of Tower Hamlets, and the community is mainly elderly. Only four synagogues remain open, in Nelsons Street, Fieldgate Street, Sandy's Row and the Congregation of Jacob in Commercial Road. Jews mainly live in Bethnal Green, Bow, Mile End, Shadwell, Stepney and Whitechapel (majority 2.3%) wards of Tower Hamlets.

However, in recent years, a number of young Jews have returned to the East End, as the area has acquired an edgy charm. Many young Jews find the mixture of inner-city cool and Anglo-Jewish roots an attractive prospect. The area has also provided many young Jews with creative inspiration and a discovery of their heritage.

Buddhist

Buddhist community, approx. 1%. The proportion of Buddhists living in Tower Hamlets is three times higher than the national average. The London Buddhist Centre in Bethnal Green is a major centre for the Buddhist community. The Centre and surrounding area is home to several residential Buddhist communities. In addition there are a small number of Buddhists of Bengali origin in Tower Hamlets.

Secular/humanist and non religion

Fourteen percent of people of Tower Hamlets described themselves as having no religious belief, which makes them the third largest belief group in the borough.

Notes:

Notes:

This report was based on a seminar Countering Extremism held on 10 March, 2011 at Brick Lane Mosque as part of a series of events organised by the Swadhinata Trust called 'One Tower Hamlets for All' funded by London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

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