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# British Muslims and Developing Notions of Citizenship

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## **British Muslims and Developing Notions of Citizenship**

1. Introduction
2. Methodology
3. Literature Review
4. British Muslims and Citizenship Discourse
5. Case Study: Islamic Citizenship Education Project
6. Conclusion
7. Bibliography

# British Muslims and Developing Notions of Citizenship

## Abstract

*This paper aims to explore the dynamics of citizenship in relation to British Muslim communities. It aims to delineate how the wider discourse of citizenship has developed and impacted on Muslim communities in Britain. One particular marker in the history of the British Muslim experience known as the Bradford Riots will be taken as an episode which led to a fundamental shift in the way the government chose to deal with the British Muslim communities with a particular emphasis being placed on citizenship initiatives after the riots. It will also look at how certain sections of the British Muslim community have responded to the general discourse of citizenship by taking one case study (Islamic Citizenship Education Project) as an example. One of the main arguments running throughout it will be the claim that citizenship is far from a static concept and should instead be seen as a site of contestation and negotiation between various groups. When viewed from this perspective, the discourse of citizenship can reveal more to us about the dynamic nature of Islam and Muslim communities in Britain today. It will look at how certain sections of the British Muslim community have appropriated and 'Islamicised' the general discourse of citizenship thereby exposing the complexities of citizenship.*

## 1. Introduction

*Citizenship has become more prominent in political discourse whenever the nature of a political community has been transformed.*

- (Faulks, 2000: 8)

In the last two decades there has been much discussion about the nature of citizenship in the realm of academia and policy making both in Britain and abroad (Taylor *et al* 2008; Kymlicka 1996; Modood *et al* 2006; Parekh 2005; Isin 2008). This has given rise to a rich discourse on the topic which has constantly been developing in response to changes in society. Citizenship has been re-conceptualized and 're-casted' (Isin 2008) time and time again leaving its definition amorphous. Citizenship can often simplistically be equated with notions of nationalism (McCrone and Keily 2000), where the central tenant is 'loyalty to one's country of abode', while for others it is more to do with the inculcation of social virtues, spearheaded by governmental education initiatives, which are held together by the consensus of a community (Sandel 2009). The latter is more concerned with issues of rights and responsibilities which transcend abstract notions of the nation which have been diminishing (Birt 2010) in the face of more complex social phenomena such as complex issues of

identity (Hall and Gay 1996; Isin 2009; Modood 2005). Moreover, definitions of citizenship bring with it a power dynamic which cannot be overlooked in so far as who defines and subsequently implements a certain conceptualization of citizenship. Citizenship therefore comes with vested interests and serves a utilitarian function being 'bound up with questions of self-interest, power and conflict' (Faulks 2000:7). Furthermore, this power dynamic cannot be divorced from issues of inequality (Dahrendorf 1996 : 28). This is most apparent, as this paper will demonstrate, with regards to majority-minority relations. For example, in Europe, definitions of nation, state, citizen and multiculturalism have mostly been the monopoly of liberal thought (Meer 2010; Modood 2007; Parekh 2005) and a conflict occurs when minority groups such as British Muslims, seek to add their voice to the debate and process of definition. In this sense, citizenship has become as contentious a topic as multiculturalism itself which has come under fire in the last two decades with criticisms of it solidifying cultural ghettos or creating a society where communities lead 'parallel lives'.

In Britain, no other minority community has been central to the debate on citizenship than the British Muslim communities. It is against the current backdrop of securitization and anti-terror discourse that British Muslims have been mostly framed (Brown 2008; Gilliat-Ray 2010) and this has severely hindered the way in which British Muslims have been dealt with in the realm of policy making with the premise that they are a 'problem community' (Abbas 2005) which need to be handled in a specific or sensitive way. There have been significant markers in the British Muslim experience which have placed them centre stage in the debate on citizenship. In this paper, the Bradford riots of 2001 will be taken as a significant preliminary marker in the history of the British Muslim experience because many fundamental shifts

occurred in the way the government engaged with British Muslim communities post-Bradford Riots (Bagguley and Hussain 2008). This was further augmented by the 2005 London bombings where a group of young British born Muslims carried out suicide missions on the public transport system. It is the policies that followed from these two events with reports such as the Cantle Report (2002) and the Ouseley (2001) report which this paper will also seek to analyze and dissect. The aim is to directly trace the way in which a growing emphasis was placed on citizenship as a tool for 'social cohesion' and subsequently the evolution of the discourse of citizenship thus far. How the discourse of citizenship has impacted and been received by the British Muslim communities will also be examined. The analysis of citizenship as a discourse will highlight more complex processes within the British Muslim communities revealing something more significant than just a minority community passively digesting a given set of stipulations on citizenship. Rather, we will see how British Muslim communities have taken the discourse handed to them by, for example, the government, and then subsequently interpreted and added aspects of their own (interpreted) Islamic tradition. Citizenship in this way then can be seen as both a subjective and selective process with a high degree of contingency and not simply a set of absolute conditions. In this respect, the power dynamic is a little more complex, and subtleties begin to appear.

The first part of my paper will seek to clarify the methodology I have adopted and to highlight the reasons behind why I think this is the most fruitful approach. I will then go on to give a brief literature review of citizenship itself, its development and contemporary formulation within a British context. After this I will analyse the discourse of citizenship with regards to British Muslim communities and finally I will take a case study of the Islamic citizenship Education Project as an example of how

certain British Muslims have adopted, refined and made additions to conceptualizations of citizenship and some of the problems this brings with it.

## **2. Methodology**

The beginnings of any social scientist's work is always the most arduous part since they must, in most cases, give an outline of the methodology they hope to adopt, the lens through which they will observe a certain phenomena or community and why they think this would be the best approach. Certain topics warrant this type of approach more than others and since I will be looking at Muslim communities it is even more incumbent upon me to clarify my methodological position for reasons I shall explain.

In recent years, no community has been essentialized, homegenised and presented in a monolithic fashion than the Muslim communities across the globe (Gilliat-Ray 2010: xii; Said 1997). In speaking of British Muslim communities I wish to conjure up the image of one of the most active and diverse social groups in the world today. Muslims in Britain alone are comprised of people who connect their ethnic heritage to various places across the world. In Britain you will find Muslims from Kashmir, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Somalia Turkey, the list goes on and on, and we can add to this list the growing number of 'indigenous' British Muslim communities consisting of white converts to Islam (Kose 1996). Furthermore, each group can be split into first, second and now third generation Muslims, all bringing different experiences of what it means to be and live as a Muslim in Britain today. We must also consider the wider implications of identity in terms of gender, race and class and see how these too are factors which continue to shape the British Muslim experience. Thus the study of British Muslim communities can not be conducted in an isolationist fashion, that is through a purely 'religious phenomena' perspective or any other narrow lens which creates an unhelpful essentialist picture of a vastly diverse community.

The challenge for the social scientist, then, is obvious: how to genuinely acknowledge this diversity without making the mistake of constructing essentialist categories themselves. Indeed, as soon as we begin to emphasise a certain facet of an individual's identity, we must proceed with a degree of caution and sensitivity since a category is constructed. The upshot of this usually leads to the reduction of multiple identities which fails to capture the dynamism involved in issues of self-identification (Hall and Gay 1996). Our main responsibility, then, as social scientists who study Muslim communities in Britain, is to continuously qualify our terms of reference. It could be said that the best categorisation of a group or individual is one that leaves the conceptual floor open for more questions and provokes further questioning thereby broadening the scope of study. It is one which allows for the updating of the subject in question as a result of changing social phenomena. However, authors such as Gilliat-Ray who, even though acutely aware of the diversity of the British Muslim communities, believes it is 'still meaningful to consider Muslims in Britain as constituting a distinctive social group, on the basis of a generally shared set of core religious beliefs (Gilliat-Ray 2010: xii).

This paper looks at the nature of Muslim communities in Britain and how it has responded to the discourse on citizenship. Although this paper focuses on one facet of a collective identity, it nonetheless acknowledges that these groups are rich. In this respect, then, my paper wishes to look at the processes and conditions behind such phenomena in order to better understand them. With this objective in mind, the methodology that I have selected in order to carry out my analysis is that of social constructionism. I will now go on to explain why I feel this method is best suited to the aims and objectives of this paper.

As James Beckford (2003) tells us in his highly acclaimed book on *Social Theory and Religion* (2003) that social constructionism:

‘...is a perspective that gives priority to questions about the processes involved in negotiating the meaning of social phenomena...’

(Beckford 2003: 193)

In looking at British Muslims and the discourse of citizenship this method is certainly pertinent as it allows us to map out the various exchanges and responses that have occurred between entities (e.g. British Muslims and government) within a given discourse. It also allows us to see how the processes involved in ‘negotiating meaning’ shape the groups involved. For instance, we shall see in this paper that in responding to the discourse on citizenship, British Muslims have also re-interpreted aspects of their own tradition in order to relate it to the demands that have been made of them.

The framework of social constructionism provides a secure net from the pitfalls of essentialist categories. As mentioned before, British Muslim communities have been the victims of essentialist categorisations leading to the failure of acknowledging their cultural diversity. Beckford makes a particular point with regards to the way social scientists can view religion in general as a monolith and how, as a consequence, this monolithic assumption can breed reductive categorisations of the members of the said religion under observation. However, the nature of the social constructionist method is such that it takes terms of references used to describe a certain phenomena or group to task. As Beckford tells us:

‘The social constructionist approach goes a long way towards averting the unhelpful consequences that flow from assuming that religion is a clearly demarcated object with generic properties’ (Beckford 2003: 24).

In relation to the Muslim communities, uniform notions of religion can often lead to the assumption of ‘uniform practitioners’ (Beckford 2003: 24). The social constructionist method acknowledges the varieties of beliefs and practices that can arise from one single belief system. Thus, there is Islam; the theology and belief, and Muslims; followers of Islam, whose makeup is one of complex, changing diversity. Social constructionism inquires into these various expressions or meanings that Islam as belief system has given rise to as a social phenomena within given contexts. It would also highlight various other ‘social agencies’ (Beckford 2003: 193) which also play a role in giving rise to such social phenomena as a result of negotiations, exchanges and the interaction of various social entities. For example, social constructionism would force us to analyse Islam in Britain and the its interaction with issues of gender, class, identity and so forth.

The implications of such a methodology are huge for the social scientist and the nature of their work. The social constructionist approach does not tolerate binary categorisations and, in fact, calls for their interrogation and this may ‘make some social scientists uneasy by appearing to call into question their taken-for-granted categories or analysis’ (Beckford 2003: 194).

The social constructionist approach also acknowledges the dialogical nature of discourse and that we as human beings are perennially engaged in an interpretive

process with regards to making sense of the world (Searle 2000: 133). This interpretive manner of engaging with one's environment involves drawing from numerous sources and religion may also be a resource for many when it comes to infusing the world with meaning:

‘It begins from the assumption that human beings are capable of learning to attribute meaning to the world around them and that in this venture some of them draw on what they consider to be religious resources.’ (Beckford 2003: 24).

Social constructionism allows us to identify the underlying process which yield a certain set of results. It is more balanced as a methodology than others. It does not favour any particular discourse, however, there is a tendency to fall into a postmodern paradox in that by saying social constructionism favours no particular discourse or worldview we forget that it is a worldview in itself. Nonetheless, this does not detract the social constructionism method from its worthy position as a valuable social science analytical tool which helps identify the certain given processes in a given social context.

In his book *Realities and relationships: Soundings in Social Construction* (1997) Kenneth Gergen identifies four salient features of social constructionist thought and it is worth stating them here briefly. The first is that ‘the terms by which we account for the world and ourselves are not dictated by the stipulated objects of such accounts’ (Gergen 1997: 47). Our account of the world around us filters through our subjective experiences. No object in our social environment, therefore, can have a meaning in of itself independent of human mediation. In this respect Gergen brings up a valid point

about the social construction of language itself and how we employ it to frame, categorize and label those objects around us. This is the basis of any epistemological framework and one must be aware of the fact that this epistemology is not something objective but very much a by product of one's engagement with the world. The second feature Gergen identifies is how 'the terms and forms by which we achieve understanding of the world and of ourselves are social artifacts and products of historically and culturally situated interchange amongst people' (Gergen 1997: 47). This is a salient feature particular with regards to the topic of citizenship in that it highlights how our definitions of citizenship are not as clear cut and subject to constant revision particularly as a result of the contribution made by various groups in a multicultural society. The third feature of social constructionism identified by Gergen is how 'given account[s] of the world or self is sustained across time and is not dependent on the objective validity of the account, but on the *vicissitudes* (shifting and unforeseen) of social processes' (Gergen 1997: 47). Again, Gergen highlights the contingent nature of a discourse itself, and how discourse is the product of a certain time and space, hence, it is only logical that a discourse shaped by 'social processes' should continue to be shaped by it. The final feature identified by Gergen concerns the use of language as deriving 'its significance in human affairs from the way in which it functions within patterns of relationships' (Gergen 1997: 47). This aspect forces us to take into account our terms of reference which grow out of the various interactions that take place between various social agents. This is also significant in our analysis, especially in relation to the case study we will look at later involving the Islamic Citizenship Education Project and how this organization has re-casted citizenship from a flexible Islamic perspective.

In the features outline above we can deduce one fundamental principle of social constructionist thought. This is the centrality of human action in the formation of discourses. With the growing emphasis in the social sciences of inter-disciplinary knowledge, social constructionism forces us to acknowledge the role social, economic and political factors play in how we view the world and ourselves. In fact, social constructionism would also force us to acknowledge more nuanced factors such as the politics of identity and the interconnectedness of causal factors which give rise to a certain discourse or set of affairs. Language is also an object of study since it is fundamental to how we assign individuals and groups into given categories (Hall 1996).

But let us relate this to our topic of citizenship. This thesis began with a quote by Keith Faulks who remarked that ‘citizenship has become more prominent in political discourse whenever the nature of a political community has been transformed’ (Faulks 2005: 8). Here Faulks acknowledges the fact that citizenship cannot be studied in some historical vacuum, nor cannot it be analysed without taking human action into account. Faulks statement is particularly profound when studying the British Muslim communities. It is a community which has undergone some huge changes in the last two decades as a result of events which have had global political and social repercussions. These events have forced the Muslim community the world over to reflect on their identity and the way they interpret their tradition in relation to the context they find themselves in.

Muslim communities in Britain are certainly going through a transformative phase now (Lewis 2005; Abbas *et al* 2005), but this statement could also give the false impression that British Muslims like the rest of society have not been evolving. We

should also be aware of the fact that minority communities can also have a transformative power themselves with regards to their social environment and the prevalent discourse. Citizenship is not only a topic pertaining to British Muslims but an important topic of discussion for the whole of British society because therein lies the potential to create a uniform notion of what it means to be a citizen in modern day Britain. So British Muslims are also engaged in the interpretive enterprise as my case study of ICE Project shall demonstrate.

### **Clarification of Conceptual Terms**

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, British Muslim communities have been the victims of essentialist discourses which have in turn produced a monolithic image of a community that is both dynamic and diverse. This paper also runs the risk of creating a monolithic or essentialist picture of the British Muslim communities unless the terms and references employed are qualified.

Since this paper deals with British Muslim communities it inevitably emphasises one particular identity over a host of others. In analysing British Muslims and the developing notions of citizenship, I am aware that I have had to omit numerous forms of identity expression such as gender, class and even the spectrum of worldviews within Islam itself, for example, liberal, conservative, Salafi, Sufi...etc, and the many other ways people/communities choose to identify themselves. But it would be impossible to represent all these nuanced identities in such a short paper without ending up with a mishmash of information and therefore lack coherency. Instead, it is better to dissect complex social phenomena and deal with issues separately for the sake of clarity. So, at times, it is better to analyse the dynamics of gender assertion

within the British Muslim communities on a separate basis, something which has been done by authors such as Katherine Brown (2008).

To solve this impasse I turn to the well-thought out work of Virinder S. Kalra who deals with the problems of labels and categories in his book *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks* (2000). When speaking of the difficulties of finding suitable analytical categories to adequately describe the subjects, in this case Pakistani and Kashmiri, of his ethnographical account he writes:

‘I argue that each of these terms is only capable of describing single, unitary constituencies which underplay divisions of gender and generation (Kalra 2000: 32).

Kalra is concerned with ethnic labels which describe and subsume all other forms and expressions of identity. Furthermore, context is a very important dimension for Kalra and the way multiple identities manifest themselves in response to various situations. This is particularly important in relation to concepts of self-identification, which cannot be taken at face value in Kalra’s opinion since it ignores the fact, for example, that ‘self-identification changes in terms of the context of the conversation; who is being talked to and the nature of the contact. Different identities are forwarded in different situations of space and time – in terms of region, village, caste, *biraderi* and religion’ (Kalra 2000: 34).

A host of categories are employed in this paper. Labels such as South Asian, Pakistani, Mirpuri, British Muslim and even other categories such as liberal, minority and majority are employed. What I wish to emphasise is the context of their usage. In

the beginning of this paper I use terms such as British Muslim communities, majority and minority in order to elucidate the wider, contemporary debate surrounding the nature of citizenship. I am aware of the richness, complexities and dynamism of all the above mentioned labels. This is why at this juncture I must emphasise the fact that my case study looks at *one* particular 'Islamic' organisation and how it has developed notions of citizenship as a response to the wider discourse of citizenship in contemporary Britain. I also look at certain markers in the British Muslim experience, in particular the Bradford Riots, which gave a huge impetus to citizenship initiatives. Labels will be employed here too, such as Pakistani, South Asian, however, again, the context is emphasised and labels are often used as purely descriptive terms in order to relay a certain episode and not in anyway indicative of the whole of that community. What this paper is primarily concerned with is 'the dialogic nature of any enunciation of identity' (Kalra 2000: 33), but in this context British Muslims, and its relation to the discourse on citizenship.

### 3. Literature Review

The most significant exposition of citizenship in Britain has been that of the British sociologist T.H. Marshall. In an essay entitled *Citizenship and Social Class* (Marshall: 1991) Marshall sought to identify what, in his opinion, were the three evolutionary stages of citizenship. Marshall saw these three stages as the products of their particular time. These were civil rights, espoused in the eighteenth century, political rights vocalised in the European revolutionary phase of the nineteenth century and then social rights in the twentieth centuries (Marshall: 1991). Marshall's particular account of the components of citizenship was in line with the progressive liberal ethos of the time. His theory of citizenship was also formulated in a post-war British context, where there was conspicuous poverty and inequality hence the 'expansion of social rights was crucial to the working class's progressive integration in British society' (Leydet 2009).

Many accounts of citizenship and its theorization rely heavily on or at least mention Marshall's conception of social citizenship (Antony 1996; Dunkereley *et al* 2002). However, in the last three decades Marshall has come under increasing scrutiny. Many believe his conception has limitations since it was a catered citizenship for the period in which he lived and thus outdated now. These same critics also say that Marshall's theorization is perniciously 'evolutionary' suggesting an ideal or a model notion of citizenship thus he is criticised for being 'uni-directional and Anglo-centric' (Lister: 2005). Hence, 'Marshall's ubiquity' as Lister states 'necessitates a re-appraisal of his work, to examine if his touchstone status is at all warranted' (Lister 2005: 40).

Critics have also warned of the implications of a liberal universalistic definition of citizenship arguing that 'one problem with the liberal conception of universal citizenship is that it is blind to the injustices that might arise from treating people marked by social, cultural and political differences in a uniform manner' (Meer 2010:11). This is most certainly true when it comes to the British Muslim communities and many academics have voiced their concern over the homogenised fashion in which Muslim communities have been studied and the way this has fed into public policies in the last two decades although this trend is changing now especially in the face of more complex sociological and anthropological theories on the nature and dynamics of social identity (Isin & Turner 2007; Modood et al 2006; Hall 1996).

For other writers citizenship as we have it today is an imbalance of rights and responsibilities with too much of a stress being placed on the latter. As Benjamin Heater states that the 'advance of the liberal version of citizenship with its stress on rights' (Heater 2004: 141) has simply created a social imbalance. Heater espouses a more 'republican' idea of citizenship where 'community and virtue must somehow be strengthened without undermining rights of individuals'. In Heater's view 'rights only exist in a communal context' (Heater 2004: 141) and the real challenge of our time is how we choose consciously to develop and encourage citizenship by taking stock of the past and also acknowledging that the discourse of citizenship can no longer be divorced from the 'global arena' (Heater 2004: 140).

Heater may be accused of eurocentricity in his analysis of the history of citizenship. Heater begins his analysis in Greece, then proceeds to Rome, the early medieval period and then deals with contemporary themes. However, throughout his book, and

in particular the conclusion, Heater acknowledges the scope of citizenship and the complexities it entails today:

‘Yet, alongside these signs of consolidation of citizenship, individuals are becoming increasingly conscious of their multiple identities, and the significance of the state, is declining. If people work in an environment of global networks of business or professional contacts; if families are deeply conscious of their religious beliefs and ethnic traditions disassociated from the mainstream culture of their country of residence; if women want to shape their lives and commitments in particular feminine ways – if developments such as these continue to burgeon, citizenship which claims a cohering function must either shrink to a weaker, because competing, form of allegiance among others, or expand to embrace them all and lose its coherence’ (Heater 2004: 143)

Heater raises many valid points and central to his concluding remarks above is the complexity of the assertion of identities in a global arena. However, Heater is pessimistic about how the assertion of multiple identities will impact on the construction of notions of citizenship. In Heater’s opinion the assertions of these multiple forms will dilute conceptualizations of citizenship and instead any construction of citizenship will lose its coherence. Is Heater, therefore, anti-multicultural or does he have legitimate concerns? Although Heater agrees that the biggest challenge we face as a society is how we will go on to define citizenship, he at the same time alludes to the suppression of certain forms of identity assertion in achieving an overarching good without acknowledging the implications of this for the human rights of minority communities. Would it not be better for Heater to forward a

more accommodating conclusion which acknowledges the reality of contemporary society with all its diversity and take that as a starting point rather than conclude that things such as a deep consciousness of one's religion or gender be viewed as problematic for the overall welfare of society? Heater falls into a harmful paradox in defining citizenship as a 'cohering function' in that by defining it as such one is able to easily accuse certain minority groups of impinging the effort of social cohesion. Heater fails where others like Raymond and Modood succeed in acknowledging that 'minorities are now setting the agenda in Britain, France and elsewhere in multicultural, post-industrial societies, as they have never done before' (Raymond and Modood 2007: 161). The latter two authors acknowledge the fact that the flow of ideas with regards to citizenship is not one way. Heater's analysis then can be criticised for taking a certain power dynamic for granted whereby the majority constructs definitions and imposes it on to a minority.

### *Citizenship and Issues of Identity*

The most prominent contemporary discussions on citizenship have involved the relationship and dynamics between notions of citizenship and the processes of identity. In this respect it has been the works of Eigin Isin and Tariq Modood which have done most to elaborate the complex nature of such discourses and the sensitive manner in which they need to be dealt with if we are to make any progress in this respect. As Raymond and Modood note that 'the notion that minority communities can operate according to a variety of loyalties at the same time is a well-established one...' (Raymond and Modood 2007: 162). Although Marshall played an important role in highlighting the social, civil and political dimensions of citizenship and charted the corresponding history thereof, he nonetheless missed the important

dynamic of how identity shapes the way we frame the discourse on citizenship. As Isin notes:

‘Marshallian citizenship has been subject to extensive criticism over the last two decades and the social model of citizenship has been expanded and deepened by approaches that emphasize the flexibility of social membership, the limitations of citizenship merely as rights, and by perspectives that emphasize identity and difference’ (Isin and Turner 2007: 5).

The shift of focus to identities in citizenship discourse has led to the demise of defining the citizen via the state and legislation. Globalisation is one factor and the mobility this also brings with it has left the associations individuals have with the state loosely defined. Porous boundaries have allowed an influx of associations to develop to the extent that a British Muslim from Bradford not only is connected here but may also have a deep seated affiliation to Pakistan or Kashmir. Furthermore, globalisation and fast-track media (internet, satellite TV...etc) has also facilitated a pan-Muslim identity or *Ummah* (Roy 2004: 287-89) which is itself a composite of numerous identities. As Heater points out that:

‘...alongside these signs of consolidation of citizenship, individuals are becoming increasingly conscious of their multiple identities, and the significance of the state, and of state citizenship, is declining...’ (Heater 2004: 143)

With respect to the recognition of a Muslim identity and all the it entails it is Modood, and more recently Nasar Meer (2010), who have written extensively on the importance of recognising religious identity as we would recognise ethnicity pointing

out that liberal societies should extend the same standard of legislative recognition (such as anti-discrimination laws) to religious identity as we do to issues of race. Modood has argued that:

‘Liberal citizenship is not interested in group identities and shuns identitarian politics; its interest in ‘race’ is confined to anti-discrimination and simply as an aspect of the legal equality of citizens’ (Modood 2007: 69)

Modood’s central argument in terms of his conception of citizenship is that citizenship is not merely about social entitlements, as conceived of by Marshall, although Marshall’s analysis and mapping out of citizenship was beneficial in assigning it to certain historical moments in time and therefore taking stock of citizenship and the particular vicissitudes of time in which it was developed. Modood recognises that the discourse of citizenship is ‘amplified by a certain kind of politics’ (Modood 2007: 125) and in today’s world this is the politics of multiple identities assertion.

However, various authors have expressed their concern with the stress on identity and the implications this has on having any productive discourse on citizenship. Does the current obsession with identity that social scientists have actually make it impossible to talk of any minority group for the fear of falling into an essentialism? This is a point brought up by Christman:

‘The central issue might be described as asking whether special weight must be afforded to “identity-based interests” on the part of members of particular

social groups characterized by commonalities of culture, identity, history, or social position.’ (Christman 2009: 187)

Christman’s concerns are legitimate and he further asks ‘how can reference be made to social groups in question while recognizing the multiple differences among members of any such group’ (Christman 2009: 187). Any discourse which speaks of minorities entails rights, entitlements and other social imbalances which need to be addressed through dialogue and debate. This debate, however, becomes impossible when the terms being employed speak of nothing tangible and are incapable of referring to any specific group. Furthermore, the practical implications of such a discourse, as Christman further tells us, begin to move away from the ‘lived experiences’ of the people whose position it wishes to elucidate and improve if need be.

However, to date, one of the more recent philosophical accounts on citizenship and Muslim identity has been that of a recent book by Nasar Meer. For Meer it is not sufficient enough to ‘obtain a historical understanding of’ the Muslim community through the ‘development [of] British approaches to minority integration’ (Meer 2010: 3). One must also ‘gain a deeper appreciation of the forms of ‘consciousness’ that are informing and shaping the assertion of British Muslim identities’ (Meer 2010: 3). Meer basis his account of what he describes as the ‘rise of Muslim consciousness’ on the African American theorist W.E.B Du Bois, in particular, Du Bois concept of ‘double consciousness’. Central to Meer’s analysis of Muslim consciousness is the dialectic between a majority and minority group and how this shapes and forms modes of consciousness and their subsequent expression in the public domain. As Meer informs us that Du Bois was very influenced by Hegelian thought, particularly

Hegel's Master Slave Dialectic and he uses this as a conceptual model to analyse 'the power held by a dominant group to afford status, invoke complicity or use coercion in denying recognition or affording misrecognition to a minority' (Meer 2010: 33). How Meer employs the same concept in relation to the rise of an avowedly Muslim consciousness is to clearly outline how the Muslim community is moving from a receptive, passive consciousness to a more active one or 'from a self-consciousness in *itself* to the transformative potential of a self-consciousness *for* itself; one's historically ascribed identity to one's politically self-constructed identity' (Meer 2010: 53-54). The power to define oneself is at the core of the contemporary discourse on citizenship and identity. It showcases the fundamental shift in the discourse of citizenship which, as I have stated before, have made the demarcating of citizenship all the more complicated. The assertion of multiple identities must inevitably come with the notion that all definitions of citizenship are contingent or relative and need to be updated in light of that complex, ever-changing, phenomena that is human nature.

Meer's account is well-thought out and he manages to give a lucid exposition of the development and constant dynamism of Muslim consciousness. Indeed, Meer's greatest achievement is the identification of a conceptual model which further elucidates the complexities of minority identities, saving it from essentialism. His account is one of a refreshing addition to the contemporary discourse on citizenship which encourages 'progressive multicultural approaches' (Meer 2010: 2).

My only criticism of Meer would be that at times he seeks to forcefully apply the Du Boisian concept of double consciousness to the British Muslim experience. For example in his concluding chapter he tells us that Du Bois work can help us to

understand the ‘emergent Muslim-consciousness’ and how it connects to issues of ‘civic status that Muslims in Britain are *seeking* compared to that they are *presently afforded*’ (Meer 2010: 198). However, Meer over emphasises the *dialectical* dimension, which is more resistant to that of a *dialogical* one. By this I mean that he fails to see that the *seeking of* and *affording status to* in relation to the British Muslim communities is inherently interwoven together, a perennial process of engaged dialogue. One other criticism of Meer’s work is that it is too abstruse at times and can seem quite aloof from the lived experiences of British Muslims. Maybe it is this type of work which academics such as Heater and Christman voice their concern over with its further complication of identity to the extent that it yields little practical fruits for the said community it claims to expound. Meer’s work also assumes that there is a distinct Muslim consciousness without really exploring or elucidating this further. For instance, we could ask whether this consciousness is political by nature or ‘religious’? Is it a reactionary type of consciousness which only manifests itself when it feels threatened? Is it a constant form of consciousness? By speaking of a distinctively Muslim consciousness Meer can also tend to speak of Muslims in a homogenised fashion only because it serves the Du Bosian model well.

The political theorist Will Kymlicka (2001) has also written extensively about the complex relationship of minority-majority relations and the implications this has on developing notions of citizenship. He speaks of the concern minority groups have with regards to ‘state nation-building’ since they ‘fear that it will create various burdens, barriers, or disadvantages for them’ (Kymlicka 2001: 1). Although primarily espousing a tightly framed notion of citizenship within the framework of the liberal political tradition ‘particularly notions of individualism, autonomy, equality, political community and national identity’ (Kymlicka 2001: 9), Kymlicka nevertheless

acknowledges the complicated interchange that takes place between the minority and the majority and how claims-making on both sides gives rise to certain reactions:

‘In reality, however, while minorities do make claims against the state, these must be understood as a response to the claims that the state makes against minorities. People talk about ‘troublesome minorities’, but behind every minority that is causing trouble for the state, we are likely to find a state that is putting pressure on minorities’ (Kymlicka 2001: 2).

Kymlicka also states how ‘current practices in Western democracies have emerged in an *ad hoc* way without any clear models or explicit articulation of the underlying principles’ (Kymlicka 2001: 4). Kymlicka’s theoretical framework is very limited since it is deeply embedded in what he describes as the ‘deeper values of liberal democracy’ (Kymlicka 2001: 4). His acute secular conceptualization of the state has been criticised by others such as Modood and Parekh for leading to the exclusion of certain members of society, especially faith groups.

Modood’s main critique of Kymlicka’s work is Kymlicka’s conception of ‘state neutrality’ (Modood 2007: 25), with an almost indifference towards religion and faith groups. His main concern is the lack of protection the state would provide to communities who are discriminated against on the basis of their religious beliefs. This, in his opinion, has varied negative implications for ethnocultural groups, ‘if it is unfair to ethnocultural groups’ asks Modood ‘then is it not unfair to ethno-religious groups?’ (Modood 2007: 25).

For Modood, the best conceptualization of citizenship is one in which different members of society have an input and that this exercise in the development of citizenship need not be ‘about decentring society or deconstructing the nation-state; rather it is concerned with integrating differences by remaking the nation-state’ (Modood 2005: 140). In this regard, Modood calls for an ‘ethical conception of citizenship’ where it is ‘not only an instrumental one as in the liberal and federation-of-communities conceptions’ (Modood 2005: 140). Furthermore, in Modood’s opinion it is better to distance conceptualizations of citizenship from nationality and nationalism which can be viewed with suspicion. Speaking of young Muslims in the West, Modood says that among them ‘...citizenship can be prized but nationality is looked at with suspicion or indifference’ (Modood 2007: 148). He instead calls for the disassociation of ‘citizenship from national identities altogether’ (2007: 148) and for the fostering of a more ethical-based notion of citizenship where ‘civic loyalties and sense of belonging’ are invested into ‘some principles of human rights-based political order, what Habermas (1992) calls ‘constitutional patriotism’ (Modood 2007: 148).

Bhiku Parekh also critiques the reductive theorisation of liberal conceptions of citizenship. For instance, he criticises Kymlicka for thinking in narrow ‘nationalists terms’ (Parekh 2002: 104) which leads to a very binary categorisation of members of the state, namely, ‘national or non-national or ethnic groups’ (Parekh 2002: 104). This taxonomy of citizens accentuates the differences between members of the same state and leads to the negative designation of ‘moral importance, status and rights’ (Parekh 2002: 104), a hierarchy of how to deal with certain groups develops, instead of acknowledging them as autonomous groups who are entitled to the same rights *regardless* of their difference.

Parekh is interesting because he defines liberalism in a different, more accommodating manner. His approach is not one of the limited liberal framework of Kymlicka, rather Parekh begins with the reality of modern nations in a globalized world today and that is that

‘Almost all societies today are multicultural and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future; this is our historical predicament, and we obviously need to come to terms with it’ (Parekh 2002: 336).

Parekh’s work looks at the nature of a multicultural society and he in a way asks that the liberalism so passionately espoused by Kymlicka and others alter itself in order to meet the challenges of such diverse societies. In this way, Parekh expands liberal thought by not relegating it to some historical narrative which must be preserved for its own sake, indeed, it could be said Parekh is more true to the nature of liberal thought in that he recognises that theories are not born out of context, rather, they are the products of a given context and as this context inevitably changes, the concept that was originally formed must also change and adapt itself to the circumstance as a logical response.

‘The dialogically constituted multicultural society both retains the truth of liberalism and goes beyond it. It is committed to both liberalism and multiculturalism, and privileges neither...it sees itself both as a community of citizens and a community of communities, and hence a community of communally embedded and attached individuals. It cherishes individuals their basic rights and liberties and other great liberal moral and political views’ (Parekh 2002: 29)

Parek's concept of citizenship is not limited to entitlements such as status and human rights. He warns us that 'although equal citizenship is essential in developing a common sense of belonging, it is not enough' (Parekh 2000: 54). This is because citizenship may afford members of society legal recognition but true acceptance consists of much more:

'Citizenship is about status and rights but belonging is about full acceptance, being recognised as an integral part of the community and able to move around it unselfconsciously and with ease' (Parekh 2000: 54).

Parekh's expands on this further by stating how 'full acceptance is a deeper notion than inclusion. Since inclusion is offered on terms set by the wider society' (Parekh 2000b: 55). For Parekh, inculcating notions of collective citizenship can not be achieved without taking into consideration the nuances of what it means to be a citizen and then taking stock of how people feel about their place in a society, whether they feel truly accepted or still feel like relative outsiders despite the rights afforded to them under citizenship.

So far I have attempted to briefly state the main themes found in the rich contemporary discourse on citizenship. What is unequivocal is that citizenship is more of a site of constant contestation. The discourse of citizenship reveals more to us about the challenges we face as a society in modern multicultural Britain and that simplistic definitions which remain indifferent to the dynamism of identities and difference can have negative implications for minority groups. However, what the literature review has also highlighted is the severe lack of qualitative work which

needs to be fulfilled especially in relation to British Muslim communities. If the heart of political philosophy and its theorists is to elucidate and find solutions to the problems faced by our society then it is vital that these works are informed by a deep awareness of their subjects of philosophical investigation. This in no way implies that the above discussed works have no substance or weight only that they would have more to offer if their theories were grounded in more empirical data.

#### **4. The Discourse of Citizenship and British Muslim Communities**

In Britain Muslim communities have made their presence felt through the specific demands they have made with regards to their faith. As a result, governments have been forced to review the way they accommodate Muslim 'religious practices in state institutions such as schools, prisons and hospitals' (Fetzer et al 2004: 3). These demands have also included areas of legislation to do with religious discrimination and how an individual's religious identity should be respected and protected in the same way their ethnic identity is (Modood 2005). With this 'rise in Muslim consciousness' (Meer 2010) there has also come the criticism of a lack of 'integration' or 'assimilation' in communities with a predominately Muslim population (Cantle 2001). One of the ways government has tried to overcome this 'problem' is by developing notions of citizenship and what it means to be a citizen in Britain today. One main avenue has been through educational programmes in schools as well as through citizenship tests.

British Muslim communities have been central to the discussion on citizenship in the last two decades (Bagguley and Hussain 2009). The place they have been afforded in this issue has not, in the most part, been due to positive events. From these events it is possible to delineate how citizenship as a discourse has developed in relation to Muslim communities in Britain. In this section the repercussions of two events in particular shall be analysed, namely, the 2001 Bradford Riots and the London bombings on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 and the subsequent reaction by the government and Muslim communities to them both. The upshot of these events greatly led to a strong emphasis being placed on citizenship as a cohering force where differences could be

amicably resolved. The discourse of citizenship was also a suitable avenue for the government to adopt when trying to inculcate a sense of national identity or push forward the integrationist agenda in order to better assimilate the ostensibly 'self-segregated' (Sardar 2009) Muslim community.

In the Summer of 2001 violent riots erupted in Bradford with clashes between mainly South Asian Muslim youths and far-right groups such as the National Front. The authorities were aware that far-right groups had planned marches but had underestimated the scale of violence and the reaction from the sizable South Asian Muslim community. In time, the rioters soon turned their frustrations on the police and began to damage public and private property (Cantle Report: 2001). Images of angry South Asian Muslim faces, throwing missiles at police and the opposition, cars set alight and further images of the police struggling to contain the rioters abound on the internet. In fact, the cultural significance of the event was so huge that it was later made into a film by the director and writer Neil Biswas in 2006. The aftermath left the whole community stunned and an overwhelming sense of failure and incredulity pervaded. Many questions were raised about the nature of the communities themselves and how members of these communities had arranged themselves along strict ethnic lines with the clear demarcation of white and Asian communities.

With the Bradford Riots a very deep line in the sand of the British Muslim experience was drawn. The riots had not only created the image of a town lacking in law and order but also tarnished the image of the sizeable Pakistani youth community. These young Pakistani and Kashmiri groups were seen to be coming from a culture that was both alien and removed from mainstream 'British culture' with both these cultures being 'poles apart' (Cressey 2002 :1). The Bradford Riots left an indelible mark in the

history of the British Muslim community. Although the riots happened in one particular location, it nevertheless, through media coverage, reached various quarters of the British Muslim communities across the UK. Bradford became a symbol for all British Muslim communities and especially young South Asian British Muslims (Cressey 2002) in that it brought home the realities of the lives of segregated and marginalised groups. Speaking of the legacy of the Bradford Bolognani tells us that:

‘Bradford has long been considered the thermometer and the thermostat of Muslim political issues in Britain: the thermometer because what happens in Bradford is widely considered a reliable symptom of what is or will be affecting the rest of the Muslim world...and a thermostat because the temperature of events in Bradford often sets the tone for policy makers in other parts of Britain...’ (Bolognani 2009: 1)

Bolognani highlights the significance of Bradford as a place where discourses about British Muslim communities are constructed. It is taken as a microcosm of the British Muslim communities by policy makers and we could also add to this by popular mainstream media which print homogenised images of the diverse British Muslim communities in what Poole calls ‘its limited frameworks and themes associated with British Islam’ (Poole 2002: 247). The discourse of citizenship in relation to the British Muslim community at large has also been heavily influenced by the state of affairs in Bradford and the Bradford Riots. As Bolognani tells us this includes not only contemporary Bradford but also the socio-economic history of Bradford:

‘As a post-industrial city with economic problems and high percentage of South Asian inhabitants, Bradford has been a centre of attention for debates on citizenship, race and class, and violent disorders’ (Bolognani 2009: 47).

The importance of the Bradford Riots can be gauged by the governmental reports that were commissioned soon after. The Home Office commissioned a ‘Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion to examine and consider how national policies might be used to promote better community cohesion, based upon shared values and a celebration of diversity’(Cantle 2001: forward). This is more popularly known as the Cantle Report. The Cantle Report reported how it was ‘struck by the depth of polarisation’ (Cantle: 10) of cities such as Bradford. The report not only noted the physical segregation of the White and South Asian communities but also spoke of how these communities had segregated themselves in terms of educational provisions, voluntary provisions and other facets of day to day life, resulting in the non interaction of these communities:

Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives’ (Cantle 2001: 9).

The real challenge outlined by the report was how improvements could be made to the lives of the inhabitants of these cities who had created conditions to living ‘parallel lives’. Central to this initiative was the creation and promotion of ‘meaningful interchanges’ amongst the different members of the community (Cantle Report 2001: 10). The historical and contemporary arrangements of these cities had led to the creation of a climate of fear. This fear was the amalgamation of a long history of

alienation and ignorance the communities had developed towards each other. The report also highlighted how government programmes aimed at tackling such issues had at times served to 'institutionalise the problems' (Cantle 2001: 11) rather than break down existing barriers.

What was required according to the Cantle report was 'a greater sense of citizenship, based on a few common principles which are shared and observed by all sections of the community. This concept of citizenship would also place a higher value on cultural differences' (Cantle 2001: 10). The report was aware that the formation of such a unified sense of citizenship would be a difficult and sensitive process. For instance, stressing some core common principles around which the members of different ethnic and faith groups could converge and also, at the same time, placing a higher value on cultural differences would be a difficult balancing act. Would certain groups be forced to make sacrifices in order to facilitate a collective good? The report also criticised the romanticised idea both communities had developed when coming to find some cohesive form of identity with one group looking back at some ostensible 'halcyon days of a mono-cultural society' and others looking at their 'country of origin' (Cantle 2001: 9). This was because a conspicuous vacuum existed in modern multicultural Britain when it came to '*what it means to be a citizen* in modern multi-racial Britain' (Cantle 2001: 9). The failure to explore this question had led to little or no sense of a common identity which spread across ethnic and religious differences.

The solution put forward by the Cantle report to end this cultural impasse, and which is highlighted in the report time and time again, was the development and nurturing of a 'meaningful concept of citizenship' (Cantle 2001: 21). One of the most striking aspects of the report was its call to foster a kind of unified historical consciousness

where the 'contributions of all cultures' to modern Britain would be fully acknowledged. This historical consciousness would be fostered through educational programmes in particular (Cantle 2001: 21). Surprisingly, in the same vein that the report advocates a sense of cultural awareness and even Britain's historical debt to the contribution of other cultures, it still nevertheless asks that 'a clear primary loyalty to this Nation' be emphasised in any citizenship educational programme (Cantle 2001: 21).

However, despite the Cantle Report's good intentioned analysis it has come under some sharp criticism for not addressing the reasons and long wrought out processes which inevitably gave rise to the riots in the first place. Bagguley and Hussain are particularly scathing in their critique of the Cantle Report and claim that it:

'...avoids analysing why the riots occurred; it avoids 'political' questions and focuses on the 'management' of cohesion. The central idea is that cohesion can be achieved through the correct application of the right managerial techniques with properly defined aims and objectives.' (Bagguley and Hussain 2008: 162)

The Cantle Report is very much bent on stating the very obvious fact that the communities are not integrated and that hardly any interaction occurs between the two. However, despite such criticisms what is clear is the report's focus on citizenship after the Bradford riots was a clear marker in the shift from a passive, surfaced multiculturalism discourse which, on the most part let communities be, to the promulgation of an active citizenship mainly through the avenues of education.

The 2005 Ouseley Report also delivered its response to the riots in Bradford. The review team called for ‘leadership, public education programmes, communication strategies and social programmes with clearly defined citizenship objectives’ to be ‘at the heart of initiatives to meet the challenges in the District’ (Ouseley 2005: 24). Active citizenship is also encouraged in the report with a specific focus on the rights and responsibilities of individual members of the community. In this regard the Ouseley Report pushes the idea of a ‘Bradfordian People Programme’ with the aim of involving ‘all young people, whatever their ethnic origin, background, appearance, status or religion’ with a ‘commitment...to themselves, their families, their friends, their fellow citizens and the communities around them’ (Ouseley 2005: 24).

Like the Cattle Report the Ouseley Report sees citizenship as an important tool for social cohesion. In particular, an emphasis is placed on citizenship education in schools where pupils are allowed to discuss and debate issues within their community with the overarching aim of constructing a more unified notion of what it means to be and live as a citizen in Britain today. For the Ouseley review team any citizenship programme of study should encourage ‘pupils to learn, from the very beginning, self-confidence and socially morally responsible behaviour’. It should also encourage active citizenship’ with ‘pupils learning through community involvement ...active dialogue and debates over controversial issues, preparing pupils for life beyond the classroom’ (Ouseley 2005: 26).

Despite the recommendations of both the Cattle and the Ouseley Reports they leave much left to be desired. Fundamental omissions are made with regards to the lived experiences of British Muslim communities. The rich history of the British Muslim communities in places such as Bradford and Oldham (Karlra 2005) is not mentioned.

Furthermore, the contemporary socio-economic situation of the British Muslim communities in cities like Bradford is given little attention, not to mention the racism in the form of the National Front and other far-right groups who have in recent years concentrated their efforts on maligning the image of the British Muslim communities (Rattansi 2007:109) and conscripting impressionable and disillusioned white youths to their 'cause' (Donald and Rattansi 1992: 75). Instead, the complexities of the social problems in Bradford are glossed over and sacrificed for the sake of a more romanticised future in which citizenship becomes a panacea for the complex problems faced by these communities. This is not say that the British Muslim communities in Bradford are not prioritised, in fact, the Ouseley Report does state how the Muslim community in Bradford has to be prioritised as "if the Muslim community fails, Bradford fails" (Ouseley 2005: 12), however, despite this little effort is made to unpack the historical patterns which have given rise to the state of affairs in Bradford which is vital to understanding the deep set lines of 'cultural ghettoisation' of both the White and Asian communities there.

Bagguley and Hussain criticise both the Cantle and Ouseley Reports in the same vein for their lack of acknowledgment of 'issues regarding wider social and economic conditions' and that those who raised such issues did so with 'limited data' (Bagguley and Hussain 2008 : 39). Little attention is given to the historical narrative of the riots in order to better understand them. Bagguley and Hussain also criticise the approach of citizenship as one-fix-all solution that reports such as Cantle and Ouseley suggest in order to eradicate the problem of segregation. Although citizenship is encouraged by the government, it is not clearly defined and this displays an ignorance of what citizenship can mean to different members within a specific group. Speaking of

conceptualizations of citizenship within Asian communities Bagguley and Hussain write:

‘The meaning of citizenship differs between generations. For the first generation citizenship is embedded within their physical state of being resident in Britain. They are just ‘denizens’ and this status is entwined within their historical ‘value’ within the economic infrastructure of the country, yet is dominated by an overwhelmingly low sense of security within the country’ (Bagguley and Hussain 2008 :154).

From this analyses we can see how notions of citizenship cannot be divorced from existing conceptualizations such as those made by first generation British Muslims. It is also vital how definitions of citizenship are inextricably born out of lived experiences, and questions of how and why the earlier generation of South Asian Muslims settled in the Northern towns of Britain in the past is an important dimension in how they think about their place in Britain in the present.

One of the more recent reports with regards to citizenship education in schools has been Ajebo Report (2007). The school according to the Ajebo Report plays a leading role in the creation and nurturing of a sense of communal identity. The report was published in 2007 long after citizenship education was made part of the national curriculum. However, the report criticised the current teaching of the national curriculum in citizenship education for lacking ‘contextual depth’ (Ajebo 2007: 7) in their teaching of citizenship and its relation to the real world:

Much Citizenship education in secondary schools is not sufficiently contextualised for pupils to become interested and engaged with the local,

national and international questions of the day and how politicians deal with them (Ajegbo 2007: 7).

The Ajegbo Report was a particular important contribution to the discourse on citizenship because it placed a particular emphasis on the dynamics of identity, which had received little attention. This was an aspect of the discourse which had not been acknowledged enough. British Muslims also received some specific mention in the report particularly since the report was published two years after the July 7<sup>th</sup> bombings in London where a group of British born Muslims carried out a suicide mission on London underground and buses. It states clearly that events such as September 11<sup>th</sup> and 7/7 all ‘contributed to the debate on community cohesion and shared values’ (Ajegbo 2007: 18). The Ajegbo Report is adamant that any talk of community cohesion should by default include a thorough examination of identities particularly the multiplicity and acknowledges that ‘we all have a multiplicity of identities, which may jostle with each other but which ultimately unite to make us individual’ (Ajegbo 2007: 29). It also highlighted the dangers of homogenising a community based on one facet of their identity:

‘...it is important to understand another person’s religion, ethnicity and culture in order to appreciate more fully who they are, it is then simplistic to define them by one of these alone (Ajegbo 2007: 29).

In this section I have attempted to map out how the discourse of citizenship has developed in relation to British Muslim communities. It is clear that British Muslims have been allocated a specific position in the discourse on citizenship. This allocation is problematic since it begins with the premise that Muslims in Britain, especially in

the aforementioned towns, are in one way or another 'riotous citizens' (Bagguley and Hussain 2008) and are in need of 'an education' on citizenship values.

In the discussions surrounding citizenship little attention has been given to the views of British Muslims themselves. Also, little qualitative work has been carried out in relation to charting the response of British Muslim communities to the debate on citizenship. This is a lacuna that the next chapter of this paper aims to fulfil (albeit on a small scale) by looking at how the discourse on citizenship has been received by certain quarters of the British Muslim community concentrating on one particular organisation which I shall take as my case study.

## 5. Case Study: Islamic Citizenship Education Project

In this section I will be examining how certain segments of the British Muslim communities have received the discourse on citizenship. As discussed before, it would be impossible for me to give a general view of the response to citizenship initiatives by the diverse Muslim communities. Instead, I have chosen to focus my attention on a particular case study focusing on an organisation called the Islamic Citizenship Education Project (ICE Project).

What will be explored in this case study is how certain British Muslims are in a way 'Islamicising' the discourse on citizenship handed down to them which is often framed by the government and various other bodies (e.g. think tanks) with a primarily liberal ethos. This interpretation of citizenship is also leading to the reinterpretation of certain concepts within the Islamic theological tradition. What will eventually become clear is how citizenship is more of a space or site of negotiation where identities and terms are formulated. As Bagguley and Hussain point out that:

'What is being expressed is not so much a contest between identity and citizenship or difference and universalism, but rather a political contest over citizenship' (Bagguley and Hussain 2008: 155)

This brings to the fore a more complicated and nuanced power dynamic in that Muslim communities in Britain are not simply dictated to but also set the agenda with regards to citizenship. In fact, as the majority tries to shape the Muslim communities, it is inevitably re-shaped itself by reviewing its own definitions. The ever-changing face of a religious community can sometimes lead secularists to think that religion is

loosing its momentum. But this is not the case and belies the dynamic nature inherent in most traditions as Beckford reminds us that 'religion is undergoing a metamorphosis instead of decline...and the boundaries between religious and secular is negotiated' (Beckford 2003: 196). This is something that will also be demonstrated in this case study.

### *Background to Islamic Citizenship Education Project*

The Islamic Citizenship Education Project is a government-backed organisation funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Communities and Local Government (CLG). Launched in 200 its objectives, as stated by the organisations itself, is to supplement the existing citizenship education programmes in English schools and add the Islamic perspective to it. 'Our overarching conclusion is clear' we are told in the introduction to the study materials, that 'citizenship values and Islamic values are broadly compatible. Indeed, all participants agreed that to be a good Muslim is to be a good citizen' (ICE Project Introduction: 1). The organisations main achievement is the backing and approval it has received from various pockets of the British Muslim communities with their 50 lessons being trialled in over 30 madrassas in six different areas of England with feedback. During this pilot stage 'pupils, parents, teachers, and education professionals commented critically on all aspects' of the materials, highlighting the qualitative dimension of the study materials (ICE project introduction: 1). Another aspect the organisation is proud of is the backing it has received from various Islamic scholars living in the UK and other leaders in the British Muslim communities. It describes the input from British Muslim scholars as 'enormous' and also tells us that both Sunni Muslims scholars as well as Shia scholars were heavily involved in the construction of the citizenship programme.

### *ICE Project and the 'Islamic' Perspective on Citizenship*

As stated before, the ICE Project aims to bring an Islamic perspective to citizenship. The organisation has tried to achieve this on two levels; one level is by stating what they see as the main principles of the Islamic worldview such as justice, equality and democracy and trying to broadly compare them with their secular or Western counterparts. The second dimension is how the project seeks to legitimize this position by drawing deeply from the Islamic theological tradition. Copious verses from the Quran are quoted as well as *ahadith* (prophetic traditions) and episodes from the Prophet Muhammad's life. These verses and instances from the prophet's life time are then given a very 'modern' interpretation. Islamic terms are also re-conceptualized, so that, for example, *khalifa*, does not simply mean a political-religious leader of the Muslim *ummah* but rather a being endowed with responsibilities which entails a strong compassion towards one's fellow human beings and a responsibility towards the environment in which he/she lives. Let us now look in more depth at the way the ICE project as engaged with the Islamic theological tradition in a British context and what the implications of such an exchange have been.

### *Citizenship and the 'Islamic' Frame of Reference*

In his discussion paper, *When Hope and Reason Rhyme* (2010) the director of the ICE project, Maurice Irfan Coles, provides a conceptual overview of the aims and objectives of the citizenship education curriculum his team have devised. The opening remarks of his paper deal a lot with the nature of democracy and he attempts to persuade the reader that it is not the sole product of the 'West'. Quoting from a recent publication, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (2009), by the political theorist John

Keane, Coles also aims to dispel the prevalent 'myth and dogma that democracy was born in Greece' (Coles 2010: 5). Coles emphasises Keane's argument that 'the concept of democracy was both kept alive and enhanced by Islamic thoughts and practices' (Coles 2010: 5). This opening by Coles is important because Islam and democracy have often been portrayed as bipolar opposites with the popular misconception that the two are, in principle, incompatible (Huntington 1997; Said ?). For Coles dispelling this myth provides the fertile ground on which further principles, taken from both the Islamic tradition and 'Western' or secular traditions, can be formulated and brought together' (Coles 2010: 7).

Furthermore, the point is made that democracy is not a fixed model which can be applied to any contexts. Instead, Coles acknowledges that 'there is no one model of democracy' and that 'although there is a great deal of commonality, the systems, structures and definitions of rights and responsibilities do vary from state to state and are subject to constant debate and controversy' (Coles 2010: 7). Democracy and citizenship are inextricably linked and their contingent nature is acknowledged by Coles frequently (Coles 2010: 13). Coles wishes to state clearly that our concepts of democracy and citizenship are being formulated constantly and this leads to the refining of definitions in light of the changing contexts of reality. Every new context brings with it a new set of players and an additional worldview which must needs be accommodated in a multicultural society. In this respect, British Muslims must also be viewed as worthy contributors to the debate on citizenship and the nature of a democratic society. As Coles reminds his reader that 'our system of liberal democracy is a relatively recent construct itself, with many of its major ideological and physical battles fought throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries' (Coles 2010: 13).

## **Re-Interpretation of Islamic Terms**

One of the most salient features of the ICE Project's citizenship education programme is how it engages closely with classical Islamic theological concepts with an aim to relate it to a modern context. Without complicating matters, the organisation focuses its attention on a few ethical principles which form the basis of their conceptualization of citizenship. They are fully aware that no one, absolute definition of citizenship can exist and speak of how the committee was 'unable to find what they considered to be a succinct definition of citizenship' (Coles 2010:15). In order to overcome this impasse the organisation identifies a few concentrated principles which they believe are central to the Islamic concept of citizenship. Producing the acronym *BIRR*, a rich Arabic word meaning 'kindness, regard for your parents, gentle behaviour and regard for others' (Coles 2010: 15), the organisation comes up with the following definition of citizenship encompassing 'belonging, interacting, rights and responsibilities' (Coles 2010: 16). All of these four aspects are combined in a holistic fashion producing a citizen who is aware of his duties towards the rest of society as well as his role as a responsible agent of good.

### *Khalifa (The Active Citizen)*

The word *khalifa* occurs numerous times in the holy Quran and is first given mention when God speaks to the angels regarding his new creation, mankind, saying:

'Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: 'I will create a viceregent (*khalifa*) on earth'. They said: 'Will Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? – whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?' He said: 'I know what ye know not'. (Quran 2:30) <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All Quranic quotes are taken from the Yusuf Ali translation. See bibliography for full details.

The term *khalifa* has received a considerable amount of interest in Islam, meaning many things to different people. For some avowedly Islamist groups, such as the *Hizb ut Tahrir*, *Khalifa* has held a stringent political meaning, being relegated to that of an Islamic political leader. In fact we get the word caliph from the same Arabic source. But the word also has the meaning of stewardship, a responsible human being, who has been endowed with the divine trust (*amanah*) by God (Quran, 33:72). This trust is comprised of a responsibility towards one's fellow human beings and towards the environment. Overall, the main purpose of the *khalifa* is to maintain justice and equality on earth (Ramadan 2009: 258; Coles 2010: 9).

In the Islamic worldview of the ICE project the concept of *Khalifa* plays a central role and is an important aspect in developing a theologically grounded notion of citizenship which Muslims can relate to. One in which secular responsibilities are underpinned and informed by the Islamic faith.

#### *Khalifa: the Active Citizen*

The ICE Project brings the classical concept of *khalifa* to a modern context in their construction of an Islamic citizenship. Active citizenship is compared to the Islamic concept of *khalifa* as Coles endeavours to explain:

‘Perhaps for active citizen we can read ‘*khalifa*’ which is translated as deputy, or vice-regent. For, like Adam, the first human, all individuals are seen as God’s deputies (Qur’an 2.30) who must look after all creation, must cherish the world and its people and bring it to a state of perfection. The responsibility that each human bears as *khalifa* is awesome but Islam, like democracy, also

stresses that individuals have rights (*huqooq*) as well as responsibilities (*wajibat*)' (Coles 2010: 34).

The ICE Project attempts to highlight the universality of this concept and how it can easily be infused into any liberal or secular conceptualization of citizenship. All the various components of rights, responsibilities with overall aim of achieving a just and fair society are emphasised. This similarity is made the more poignant by going to the heart of the classical Islamic tradition and, in a way, aims to promote the inherently harmonious nature of both liberal and Islamic thought.

*Sahifa or the Medina Constitution: the first multicultural constitution*

The ICE Project also draws on the narrative of the Islamic tradition to lend legitimacy to its citizenship programme. Certain aspects of the Prophet Muhammad's life are brought to bear on a modern context. In this regard it is an episode from the Prophet Muhammad's life wherein he drafted what is thought to be a constitution outlining the rights and responsibilities of pagans, Jews, Christians and Muslims in Medina. The project describes this as 'the world's first written multicultural constitution' (Coles 2010: 9) with a 'surprisingly 21<sup>st</sup> century ring' to it' (Coles 2010: 33). In the Constitution of Medina we see how the Prophet sought to organise society on the principles of fairness, equality and justice wherein each religious faction would 'co-operate to ensure law and order', where social security was granted to all despite their religious affiliation and where everyone was 'free to pray as they wished' (Coles 2010: 33). Thus the Prophet himself is portrayed as a very 21<sup>st</sup> century multicultural man who promoted tolerance and social cohesion, aspects which any liberal society could relate to.

### *The Need for an Islamic Citizenship Programme*

Although the ICE Project manages to construct a viable Islamic citizenship education programme, the question needs to be asked why they felt the need to do this. If, as we have seen, Islamic concepts of citizenship are broadly compatible with secular notions of citizenship, then why did they feel the need to create a distinct programme? During my interview with one of the ICE project managers, Khalid Mahmood, this question was raised. His response was that if children were raised in a particular faith tradition it was an important facet of their overall identity in terms of instilling values:

“If you speak to children who follow a faith and then where they get their main guidance of their life from, they will say their religion”

Therefore to have a citizenship education programme saturated in the language and terminology of Islam was an immediate way of relating Muslim children to the topic of discussion. Faith is put to action with practical lessons in citizenship and how one can relate their Islamic upbringing to a modern British context. However, it was also emphasised that the existing secular citizenship education curriculum being taught in state schools was the basis on which the Islamic citizenship education project was based.

### *BIRR: Belonging, Interaction, Rights/responsibilities and Roles*

Mobilising the British Muslim youth from an Islamic based perspective was achieved by the organisations acronym *BIRR* which Khalid elucidated further. *BIRR* covers Belonging, Interacting Rights/Responsibilities and Roles and all of these elements taken together are meant to produce the model active citizen:

‘[Citizenship] is to understand that you belong to a country, to a place, to a religion, to a community, to your faith...just the understanding that you belong to something. Then it’s about interacting within your community, within your religion, or city, or country and its also about interacting outside your comfort zone as well. Interaction is important in citizenship. Then rights and responsibilities is about understanding your rights and responsibilities and understanding and protecting other people’s rights as well and then your role in society. This is what citizenship is’.

The confidence with which Khalid Mahmood spoke of the aims and objectives of the ICE Project during our interview is very much the result of a combination of thorough grounding in Islamic theology and the strong backing the ICE project received from the Muslim communities, various *madrassas*, a number of educational leaders and other organisations such as the Citizenship Foundation.

Khalid also discussed how he thought the project broke down barriers within the Islamic theological tradition between various schools of thought and sects of Islam. The aim to find an Islamic citizenship backed with copious references from the Quran and *ahadith* (traditions of the Prophet) enabled various factions of the Muslim communities to transcend theological differences and come together for the common good. Khalid described the ‘coming together of all schools of thought’ as the most ‘positive’ achievement of the project with theological hair splitting being avoided with Islamic scholars being asked to pick out verses of the Quran and *ahadith* pertaining to citizenship and then explaining them ‘in plain English’ without going into the various *tafaseer* of these verses and *ahadith*. According to Khalid it was important that all strands of the British Muslim communities had an input during the

construction of the programme otherwise ‘people would have said that this is an agenda’ of a particular school of thought.

### *The ICE Project and Nature of Tradition*

The current discourse of citizenship in relation to the British Muslim community also provides us with a rich account of the dynamism and inbred evolutionary character of Islam in Britain. The word tradition can conjure up connotations of an ossified worldview with a set of outdated protocols which are not on par with ‘modern’ society. Tradition is often seen as a hindrance and the antithesis of progression (Sardar 2006: 10). Tradition is also viewed as a limited framework which reproduces the practices of the past. As the anthropologist Shils tells us that:

'Tradition' and 'traditional' are among the most commonly used terms in the whole vocabulary of the study of culture and society. The terms 'tradition' and 'traditional' are used to describe and explain the recurrence in approximately identical form of structures of conduct and patterns of belief over several generations of membership (Shils 1971: 123)

But as our account of the ICE Project has demonstrated British Muslims are utilising their tradition in order to engage with the rest of ‘modern’ British society. The discourse of citizenship has indeed created a space for British Muslims to remain faithful to and yet at the same time introduce a degree of novelty to aspects of their own tradition. We have seen how traditional Islamic theological concepts such as *Khalifa* and *Birr* have been interpreted with a new, ‘modern’ meaning transforming them into concepts with an actual function in a contemporary context. We have also seen how the main personality of the Islamic faith, the Prophet Muhammad, has also

been reinterpreted as an ‘enlightenment’ man who was in many respects ahead of his time with the first ‘multicultural constitution’.

The discourse of citizenship therefore is more helpful when viewed as a space in which various elements are played out, all equally affecting each other. We cannot speak of citizenship without speaking of culture, tradition or issues of identity. In relation to tradition it teaches us that it only continues to thrive when modifications are made to it. However, as Shils points out that this in no way diminishes the origins of that tradition and that any kind of novelty owes its debt to the past:

‘All novelty is a modification of what has existed previously; it occurs and reproduces itself as novelty in a more persistent context. Every novel characteristic is determined in part by what existed previously; its previous character is one determinant of what it became when it became something new’ (Shils 1971: 122).

It also brings home the fact that British Muslims are not merely ‘settlers’ trying to plant their feet in firm soil of Britain, but that they are part and parcel of the evolution of contemporary British society. As Levy tells us that ‘the notion of ‘settlement’ in this context can be misleading. Our so-called religious settlements mostly are and always have been dynamic and evolving arrangements’ (Levy 2008: 20). The way in which the ICE Project is exploring and reinterpreting the Islamic tradition reveals that certain sections of the British Muslim community feel they can explore the possibilities of their tradition with confidence in contemporary Britain.

### *Critique of ICE Project*

Although the creators of the ICE project should be commended for their attempt in trying to assuage ostensible differences between British Muslims and the rest of British society, it nevertheless seems like a desperate response to the securitised discourse in which British Muslim communities have been embedded in the last few years (Brown 2008; Birt 2010). The ICE Project has, in a way, almost internalised the idea that British Muslims are a problem or a potential problem and need to be dealt with in specific ways. The language of the project is very much in line with the language we have seen used in the Preventing Violent Extremists initiatives of the past<sup>2</sup>. The curriculum then becomes not so much a tool of social cohesion but rather a programme designed with a specific intention of deterring any potential, young, aspiring British Muslim extremist (Gilliat-Ray 2010). For instance three pages of Coles conceptual overview are dedicated to the subject of jihad and at times can come across as patronizing and suggest that most young British Muslims are impressionable to extremist ideology. Take the following statement by Coles where he states that:

‘...subsequent jurists have agreed that Muslims should not start wars unless they the justification of self-defence, stopping oppression or defending the freedom of religion. On no account can armed struggle be used to force people to become Muslims’ (Coles 2010: 24).

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<sup>2</sup> See *Preventing Violent Extremism: Sixth Report of Session 2009-10 - Report, Together with Formal Minutes, Oral and Written Evidence (HC)* by House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (2009)

Coles continues his exposition of Islam's position on topics such as suicide bombings and the compatibility of the values that underlie *shariah* with laws in Britain (Coles 2009: 27). Taken together these themes are those which crop up in sensationalist media outlets. The ICE Project seems bent on responding to these popular misconceptions of Islam at the behest of what really matters to British Muslim communities with regards to their everyday lived experiences. Constructing a citizenship in reaction to such sensationalists stories severely limits the scope of the project. Furthermore, the advocacy of a citizenship programme which emphasises belonging, interacting, rights, responsibilities and roles can sometimes come across as belying the history of the contribution British Muslims have made to the building of modern day Britain (Kalra 2005; Visram 2002; Ansari 2004). Would it not be better for the ICE Project to have something in the curriculum which narrates the long history of Islam in Britain, which can now be traced back to at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century? (Mattar 2008). Would this historical consciousness not be a better aspect to draw upon in order to create a greater sense of belonging? For example, Britain's mosques have long been centres which have served the local community well and can be taken as a model of a how a community can come together and organise the provisions it needs without the support of the government (Gilliat-Ray 2010). In this respect the ICE Project does not acknowledge the role that mosques have played in inculcating the sense of a good citizen. Britain's mosques for decades have been places for charitable causes and centres in which Muslims from across the globe have managed to come together for the benefit of their community. At times, Britain's mosques have stepped in where the government has failed. Is this not a positive display of active citizenship?

This internalisation of the securitization discourse can, however, be identified as the natural reaction of a minority community which has been framed in such terms for so long now. The references and labels used to describe British Muslims in popular media and academic discourse can sometimes make it impossible for the said community to react differently. Again, analysing citizenship as a discourse can reveal a lot about the ways in which British Muslim communities are framed and then analysed within this limited frame work. The ICE Project does not attempt to distance itself from this securitised and anti-terror discourse. For the academic Yahya Birt this is an extremely important problem for the British Muslim community to tackle:

The most important point that British Muslims can make in these secondary debates on issues like multiculturalism is to insist that they cannot be completely redefined by reference to terrorism for the simple reason that whatever the causes of disaffection or disadvantage are among Muslim communities, there is no causal conveyor belt leading automatically to the London attacks... whose cultural idiosyncrasies will next be found to promote Islamist extremism and violence: Somalians, African-Caribbeans or Ethiopians? (Birt)

In my interview with Khalid Mahmood the issue of the Preventing Violent Extremism agenda was raised. When asked whether he thought the citizenship education initiatives were merely a smokescreen for PVE and assimilationist agendas, he acknowledged the fact that the ICE Project's funding had come from PVE but that it in no way diminished the value of the programme. 'The government had no say over the content of the end product' he said with a reassuring tone.

### *Atavistic Language*

Another valid criticism that can be levied against the ICE Project is it magnifies the Islamic facet of a diverse group by speaking to them in purely Islamic terms. The Muslim identity is accentuated to such an extent that one would think that British Muslims only understand language which is saturated in Islamic terminology. This gives a false impression of British Muslim communities and inevitably emphasises a separateness instead of a unity which is founded on some basic agreed upon principles. It is a startling paradox that the ICE Project emphasises similarities of citizenship in exclusive Islamic terms, which seems to defeat the intended purpose of trying to unite various groups of people around a few core, agreed upon principles on citizenship.

### *Re-homogenising the Muslim Community*

Through their use of language the ICE Project make the grand mistake of re-homogenising the British Muslim communities. No thought is given to the ethnic and social make up of British Muslim children who all bring with them an array of experiences. The idea that all these children can be spoken to in one uniform manner and thereby create ideal citizens betrays the harsh realities that some of these youngsters face on a daily basis ranging from peer pressure, gangs, drug abuse, unemployment, educational underachievement and poverty (Alexander 2000). Although the intention of the ICE Project may be well placed, it nevertheless falls into the trap of seeing citizenship as a panacea to the complex problems of the Muslim communities in Britain. No thought is given to multiple identities; gender, class, the degree of religiosity of the pupils, all this is sacrificed for the sake of a simplistic notion of citizenship. Diversity is sacrificed for the sake of appeasing the manufactured fears of the government and popular media. At times the curriculum is

culturally patronizing, re-explaining the tradition to Muslim youth as if they were totally ignorant of their Islamic heritage.

## 6. Conclusion

My attempt to analyse the ICE Project suffered many setbacks ranging from having difficulty in making contact and arranging interviews to the limited time scale. Although I managed to get an interview with one of the organisations project leaders who was able to take me through the ethos and objectives of the project, this analysis would have been more insightful if I was given the time to actually see the curriculum in action in the schools and madrassas that had chosen to adopt it. It would have been more beneficial if I could have got qualitative feedback from the pupils who were at the heart of the programme to see how they felt about it. This would have also allowed me to gauge the reception of the ICE programme. In this respect, I am aware that some of the most fundamental questions that this dissertation had the potential to explore were left unanswered. Furthermore, it would also have been beneficial to carry out a comparative analysis of secular citizenship initiatives, comparing them with Islamic based ones to see the differences and similarities as well asking whether a more unified position of citizenship could be formulated.

What this paper has shown is that citizenship is a highly contested topic, which is constantly being updated and revised in relation to the changing make up of modern multicultural British society. Citizenship is no longer the domain of a privileged group, nor is its agenda easily dictated by academics or policy makers. In fact it would be better not to try to define citizenship in restrictive terms since doing so leads to the inevitable exclusion of one group or another. Instead, citizenship is best viewed and analysed as an ongoing, evolving and dynamic discourse with contributions made by various members of society. It would, then, be more helpful to speak of *citizenships* in the plural and produce a taxonomy of how various groups think of citizenship and use that as a basis to conduct a comparative analysis. In relation to the

British Muslim communities this paper has shown that the discourse of citizenship cannot be divorced from the context and historical experiences of British Muslim communities. The way we frame and define citizenship is very much a product of what takes place on the ground, hence, it is vital to consider the adage that concepts change as people change. The ICE Project case study reveals a lot to us about the capability of British Muslims to adapt and reinterpret their tradition in order to confront the various challenges they are faced with. It is certainly an example of the intellectual advancement of the British Muslim community within a modern British context and displays a level of confidence in the way they are freely relating their classical tradition to a modern secular context. The ICE Project is successful in dispelling the popular myth of Islam as a stagnated worldview incapable of contributing anything to modern society. However, like the general discourse on citizenship the British Muslim community have a long way to go in terms of freeing themselves from a securitized framework and must continue to reclaim themselves on an intellectual level as Yahya Birt mentioned. However, as the response to the Bradford Riots and the July 7<sup>th</sup> Bombings from the government in forms such as the Cante, Ouseley and other reports, it is clear that British Muslims are being asked to bear the burdens of a nation which is currently ill at ease with its identity. As Yahya Birt tells us:

At a time when national sentiment is eroded by commodification, devolution, relations with Europe, cultural diversity, globalisation, even by a collective failure of the imagination, is it just or fair to expect minority groups to bear disproportionately the burdens of nationhood in moments of crisis like this? British Muslims are then engaged in the dialectics of citizenship which can on the whole be viewed as a positive thing (Birt 2010).

British Muslims are engaged in the dialectic of citizenship and are at times caught in the crossfire of ideas, but as the ICE Project and other British Muslim led initiatives show us that they are also beginning to have their voices heard and are choosing no longer to be passively defined.