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CITIZENSHIP, PARTICIPATION AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AMONGST BRITISH MUSLIMS

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Recent thinking on the topic of citizenship addresses the diversity to be found in contemporary societies. In so doing, it draws attention to issues raised by the assertion of group identities. Correspondingly, developing conceptions of citizenship move beyond considerations of individuals' legal rights and obligations, and highlight the importance of exploring the processes by which collective rights are asserted. This puts the issue of identity and identity-related action centre stage. In this paper we develop a social psychological perspective on collective identity and action that contributes to these developments. Using data gathered from Muslims living in Britain, we explore the arguments taking place within this community concerning their relations with the non-Muslim majority (especially as manifested in a debate concerning participation in UK General Elections). We show that Muslim identity is a site of contestation with different identity constructions being advanced by those seeking to organise divergent forms of claims-making and collective action. More specifically, we show how contrasting forms of action (designed to bring about different social relations) are advanced through different invocations of Prophetic example when Muslims were social and numerical minorities. Overall, we hope to illustrate the importance of conceiving of identities as constructed in the context of articulating, and mobilising support for, political claims.

Introduction

Social scientists interested in citizenship are increasingly interested in group identities and their assertion. Group attachments are particularistic and so, as Isin and Wood (1999) observe, test the limits of the individualistic and universalistic assumptions permeating traditional conceptualisations of citizenship. Of course, these latter are complex and have undergone significant

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development. For example, in a now classic account of citizenship, Marshall (1950) described an historical progression in which civil rights (such as freedom of speech, the right to hold property) were followed by political rights (such as the right to vote) and, more recently, the social rights (e.g., access to education, welfare, etc.) necessary for the realisation of the former. However, increasing sensitivity to cultural diversity has brought to the fore a latent tension between "the actuality of a plurality of social identities" and "the singular identity implied by citizenship" (Purvis & Hunt, 1999, p. 458) motivating broader conceptualisations of citizenship. In particular, a concern with racism and xenophobic exclusion has prompted awareness of people's needs for "recognition" and the violence of "misrecognition" (Taylor, 1994). Indeed, issues concerning the recognition of collective identities have taken centre stage in contemporary debates about citizenship and many minority groups have drawn upon various discourses of personhood and "human rights" which construe collective identity "as a category of human rights" and which proclaim a universal right to "one's own culture" (Soysal, 2000, p. 6).

Whereas some may lament these developments, others regard them more positively. Purvis and Hunt (1999) suggest that rather than trying to avoid the tensions between the particular and the universal we should view such tensions as productive and as contributing to democratic politics. Citizenship, they suggest, may be conceived as "a project through which alternative identities vie for instantiation in the political institutions and discourses of society" (p. 458). Correspondingly, emerging analyses of citizenship refer to the diverse, everyday, contexts in which struggles for "recognition" take place. They do not only refer to legal obligations and entitlements but include the practices through which individuals and groups formulate and claim new rights (Isin & Wood, 1999). In turn, the issue of identity-related claims-making requires that we attend to the construction of identity and the organisation of collective mobilisation designed to restructure social relations.

Social psychologists have much to say on the topic of identity, and the centrality of group identity in recent analyses of citizenship demands a social psychological input into this domain. Such an input may not only be productive for those interested in citizenship. It may also be productive for social psychological theory. If the domain of citizenship illustrates anything it is that definitions of identity are intimately bound up with claims-making and that social psychological analyses of identity definition must be sensitive to this strategic dimension. Yet, as we will see, the strategic nature of identity definition (and related issues concerning the construction and contestation of collective identity) has often been neglected in social psychological theory.

Diversity and Exclusion

Diversity challenges many conventional assumptions about social organisation and harmony. At the heart of most traditional conceptualisations of citizenship is the concept of the nation (Castles & Davidson, 2000; Delanty, 2000; Poole, 1999; Sanchez-Mazas & Klein, 2003; Sanchez-Mazas, Van Humskerken, & Casini, 2003). Typically, the rights and obligations of citizenship are construed as contingent upon national belonging. Indeed, the "imagined" "horizontal solidarity" (Anderson, 1983) of the national community was crucial for the apparent universality of citizenship, and the idea that national communities are homogenous entities remains implicit in many lay and traditional conceptualisations of nations and citizenship. Interestingly, Licata, Klein, Casini, Coscenza, & Azzi (2003) suggest that popular assumptions about the role of similarity as a basis for common identification (and the experience of solidarity) also have their roots in this "national model".

However, the idea that nations are homogenous is actually highly problematic (Parekh, 1994, 1999). Rather than nations having an intrinsic homogeneity, this may best be viewed as a political project prosecuted through controlling access to the public sphere. For example, Rygiel (1998) describes how in Turkey, Ataturk sought to develop an homogenous national identity that differentiated Turks from their Islamic neighbours. Public expressions of Kurdish identity (e.g., the use of Kurdish language) were controlled and cultural/territorial space homogenised. So too, public expressions of Islamic identification were limited. For example, Turkish national identity was developed through the regulation of women's rights. As Rygiel puts it, the control of women's behaviour and dress (especially the prohibition of the headscarf) defined the ideological and physical boundaries of the new secular state. In other words, a particular vision of the nation and nationalist project was realised through a series of citizenship practices which shaped activity in the public sphere.

If such homogenising visions and practices are most obvious in the early stages of nation-building, they are not restricted to such periods: typically the day-to-day reproduction of the nation involves similar processes. In advanced industrial societies this has been made more visible by the reality of mass migration which has prompted renewed discussion as to the public expression of diverse identities. In these discussions there have been a range of national visions. Some have sought to develop multi-cultural projects. Yet others have sought to resist these, calling for the "re-establishment" of a "common culture" with the rights of citizenship being contingent upon identification with this commonality. For example, in the UK a well-known Conservative government minister challenged the idea of an inclusive multi-

cultural Britain through advancing the idea of a "cricket test" in which only those cheering the English team over their Indian, Pakistani, or West Indian opponents could really count as British. That is, citizenship was to be offered on assimilationist grounds: people were to be given rights in return for their conformity to certain "cultural preconditions" (Andrews, 1991).

From what has been said so far it should be apparent that calls for the "re-establishment" of a singular culture should not be taken at face value. As Isin and Wood put it, such calls are "deceptive and dangerous" because "there is no common culture that 'may cease to be'". Rather, what exists are "the attempts of the dominant class to homogenise all groups, to impose its own political and social values on them and to ignore or forcefully suppress those who disagree." They continue that there never was a common culture of which citizenship was an expression. Rather "there are dominated and dominant groups between which citizenship is a mediating institution and a contested field" (p. 63). Viewed from this perspective the attempt to mask diversity does not function to constitute people as rights-bearing individuals but rather renders minorities "invisible and powerless" (Isin & Wood, 1999, p. 63).

Muslim Identity in Britain

Thus far we have spoken of the public recognition of diverse identities in multicultural societies and how citizenship may be viewed as a mediating institution in such struggles. We have also spoken of a broader conception of citizenship that makes reference to the processes by which people articulate and claim new rights. An important dimension of such processes includes the construction and dissemination of particular identity definitions, and in this paper we explore how Muslim activists in Britain articulate divergent claims through advancing strategically constructed definitions of Muslim identity. In a subsequent section we shall have more to say on our conceptualisation of identity and what it means to say that identities are constructed. For the present let us address current conceptualisations of Muslims in the West. If essentialist assumptions continue to plague academic thinking on identity in general (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000), they seem to have a particularly potent force when the identity in question is that of "Muslim".

Whilst all Black people in Britain have been subjected to assimilationist demands, Britain's Muslims have, in recent years, been particularly targeted and represented as deeply problematic for Britain's national life (Runnymede Trust, 1997). To some degree this is bound up with a broader European historical antipathy to Islam (Delanty, 1995). However, it continues to be shaped by contemporary events (e.g., those of September 11th 2001) and has pro-

found implications for issues of identity, multiculturalism and citizenship. If negative constructions of Muslim identity may be found across the British political spectrum (Muslim Council of Britain, 2002), the far-right expresses this antipathy most starkly. For example, the British National Party recently instigated its "campaign against Islam" with a document using the words "Intolerance, Slaughter, Looting, Arson, Molestation of women" printed vertically to quite literally spell out what the BNP believes ISLAM stands for (BNP, 2002). Central to the campaign is the construction of Muslims as an alien Other. For example, rejecting the British Prime Minister's claim that there is no contradiction between being Muslim and being a British citizen, the document asserts that whilst this may well be the case for "the average Westernised Muslim who goes along with the family religion without giving it much thought", "for any good Muslim who reads the Koran and accepts its claims to be the literal word of Allah, this is another Blair lie". Thus although apparently recognising diversity amongst Britain's Muslims, it is clearly implied that there is a single "authentic" Muslim identity, the adoption of which makes identification with Britain impossible. Indeed, any diversity amongst Muslims is construed as evidencing variation in individuals' degree of identification with this (singular) identity. Furthermore, the document continues that not only is an Islamic identification incompatible with a British identification, but that multiculturalist policies themselves constitute weapons in Islam's "war against the West" "fought, not just with terrorist outrages but in every schoolroom where non-Muslim children are forced to learn how wonderful Islam is supposed to be" (BNP, 2002).

One of the most striking features of this document is the way in which its characterisation of Islam and Muslim identity is grounded. The document is liberally peppered with Qur'anic verses that supposedly illustrate what the BNP claim is Islam's "*fundamentally* aggressive nature" (original emphasis). For example, verses concerning the punishment of corruption through the destruction of the wrongdoers' houses are cited and followed with a reference to the events of September 11th: "Sounds just like New York, doesn't it". Similarly, after verses concerning the fate of unbelievers in Hell, the report referred to recent crowd disturbances in Bradford (a northern English town) and contended that the verses' "vision of a riot in Bradford" was not "just a matter of damnation in the next world", but a present reality which the Muslim faithful visit upon their non-Muslim neighbours. In other words, not only are we offered a singular homogenising definition of Muslim identity but this is highly essentialised: there is but one way of being "a good Muslim" and this transhistorical essence is manifest in the Qur'an, and past/present violence.

Such constructions are not new. Western essentialist visions of Islam have a long history (Abdel-Malek, 1963, translated 1981; Said, 1978). Nor have

they gone unchallenged. In response, social scientific analysts have emphasised historical and geographical variation between Muslim communities to reveal "as many Islams as there are situations that sustain it" (Al' Azmeh, 1993, p. 1). So too they have emphasised the contextual contingency of Muslim identities and recommended that those in the West be seen "as local, as indigenous not as the other, the exotic or the Oriental" (Ahmed & Donnan, 1994, p. 5). Throughout this critical work there is an emphasis upon the innovation and creativity apparent in Muslims' religious identifications. For example, in their claims-making engagements with non-Muslim majorities, some Muslims have drawn upon "post-national" universalistic discourses of personhood and "human rights" (Soysal, 2000, p. 6). That is, they have invoked a language of rights (and hence discourses of citizenship) resulting in mobilizations which, to quote Soysal, are "not simply a reinvention of ethnic or religious particularisms" but "reflect larger scripts of rights and personhood" (p. 10. See too Modood, 1993).

Such evidence of innovation and creativity in identity definition, and its relationship with claims-making, reiterates the importance of social psychology addressing the contemporary and strategic nature of identity definition.

A Social Psychology of Identity Construction

Our approach adopts many of the insights to be found in self-categorisation theory (SCT: Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). According to the theory, people do not only have single, individual identities. Rather, the self may be defined at different levels of abstraction. Sometimes, it may be defined in terms of individual uniqueness. At other times, it may be defined in terms of a specific group membership. This psychological shift from personal to social identity underlies the behavioral shift from interindividual to intergroup action. More specifically, when ingroup identity is salient group members' behaviour conforms to the contents of the ingroup stereotype and there is considerable evidence for the role of collective identity in structuring social and political action. For example, Stürmer and Kampmeier (2003) show how community identification shapes community volunteerism.

Recently, Reicher, and Hopkins (2001) have argued that the salience and meanings of such collective self-definitions are not determined in any mechanical way. Rather, which identities are relevant, the nature of their boundaries and their inclusivity, and these identities' substantive contents, are constructed in and through discourse. Furthermore, they are sites of argument with those organising different forms of collective action constructing ingroup identity strategically so as to construe such action as expressing col-

lective identity. This means that whilst it is entirely appropriate to research the behavioural consequences of adopting particular identity definitions we also need to investigate identity-related argument. So too we need to attend to the processes of identification through which such constructions become psychologically potent.

Conceiving of identity as strategically constructed in order to realise particular projects has several merits. Some of these are quite general. The situations in which groups find themselves are far from static and group members are constantly faced with dilemmas as to the meaning of contemporary events, the futures that may be envisaged, and the action necessary to realise those futures. Given the relationship between action and identity, it follows that these controversies over action necessarily translate into contending identity constructions. Rather than being a timeless given, identity is actively constructed in the context of contemporary dilemmas and hence is subject to innovation and change. In the context of citizenship there are more specific merits in attending to within-group argument. As we have already observed, broader, more "active", conceptions of citizenship consider how individuals and groups identify, articulate and seek to realise particular demands. In order to interrogate such processes it follows that researchers need to address the ways in which groups come to construe such demands as identity-relevant and appropriate. In other words, a first step in any analysis of claims-making must attend to the ways in which activists construe their proposals as integral to the realisation of collective identity. In the present paper we explore this latter through exploring how activists proposing different courses of action seek to mobilise collective support for such action through advancing quite contrasting definitions of Muslim identity.

Contemporary Dilemmas: UK Electoral Participation

The contemporary controversy that we investigate concerns Muslim participation in UK elections. Electoral participation is intimately bound up with citizenship. Indeed, the right to vote is typically taken to be indicative of one's citizenship. However, not all Muslim activists view electoral participation in these terms and some have urged Muslims to demand alternative institutional arrangements through which they could express their political views. This debate about electoral participation is part of a much wider debate about the relationship that Muslims in Britain should develop with the non-Muslim majority and how Muslim identity could secure public recognition.

For our purposes the most striking feature of this controversy is the way in which participants advance different projects through different identity definitions. This is not to say that there are no commonalities. Many have

referred to Prophetic example when Muslims lived as minorities amongst non-Muslim majorities. These include *i.* the period before the foundation of the First Islamic State in Madinah when Muhammad and his companions lived as a minority in Makkah amongst the non-Muslim tribe of the *Quraysh*; *ii.* the period in Christian Abyssinia (where Muhammad sent some of his followers from Makkah for safety); iii. periods when earlier Prophets lived in minority contexts (e.g., Yusuf in Egypt). However, although frequent references to such examples are common, this should not be taken as evidencing agreement on the nature of Muslim identity. Far from it: the meanings and contemporary implications of these commonly invoked examples are often quite diverse.

Analysis

Our analysis is organised to highlight the contested use of Prophetic example in the definition of Muslim identity in Britain. As we are interested in how identity is constructed strategically to legitimate different visions of future social relations, and to organise different forms of claims-making and collective action we have chosen to analyse constructions articulated by activists associated with different organisations. Inevitably this means that we cannot gauge the degree to which "ordinary" (non-activist) Muslims participate in these debates. Nor do we have anything to say about the degree to which these latter accept or reject the activists' diverse definitions of Muslim identity. Indeed, as we are only concerned to illustrate the ways in which different political claims (and the forms of action necessary for their realisation) are advanced through the strategic construction of identity, it follows that the degree to which particular identity constructions receive wider endorsement is beyond the scope of the present paper. It is also appropriate to note that talk of the Muslim community in Britain is to be treated with caution. We have no data on people's identification as "Muslim". However, for our present purposes this is not an issue. As Brubaker and Cooper (2000) explain, activists' reference to a bounded community does not necessarily reflect social reality. Rather, such talk is structured to organise such a collective identification. In other words, such rhetoric has "a performative, constitutive dimension, contributing, when it is successful, to the making of the groups it invokes" (p. 33. See too Reicher & Hopkins, 2001, for a discussion of how identity constructions function in changing social reality).

Resources

The experiences of Britain's Muslims are addressed by several national groupings, many of which were established in the context of the Rushdie affair (Lewis, 1994). All have sought to develop a Muslim community identification which transcends narrower ethnic identifications (especially those with immigrants' countries of origin). All address issues faced by Muslims living in Britain and the political representation of Muslims' interests. All organise public meetings, produce pamphlets and newsletters, and all feature regularly in the Muslim media established to address Muslims' experiences in Britain.

Given our interest in the contestation to be found in the British Muslim public sphere our data come from publications produced by these groups and contributions in the following newspapers and magazines: *Trends* (July 1996 – April 1998), *The Muslim News* (December 1996 – December 1999), *Crescent International* (October 1996 – December 1999), *Q-News* (December 1996 – December, 1999).

Methods

For the purposes of the present paper we focused on materials concerning Muslims' participation in UK elections. Inevitably this topic was more salient in the build up to the 1997 General Election. Pursuing our interest in the strategic definition of identity we have not tried to map the full range of opinion evidenced in these media. Rather we noted variations in the invocation of Prophetic example and were led to consider how this variation related to the different activists' projects and strategic concerns. The criterion for selecting extracts for inclusion in this paper was that they illustrate the strategic dimension to this variability in construction[1].

The Construction of Prophetic Experience and Muslim Identity

Pro-boycott invocations of Prophetic experience. We start with the construction of Muslim identity advanced by activists linked with the *Muslim Parliament of Great Britain.* This was established in 1992 by activists associated with the late Dr. Kalim Siddiqui who was a prominent champion of

[1] Where material is excluded from a quoted extract this is denoted by the insertion of two rounded brackets i.e., ( ). Where explanations are added in the middle of a quoted extract they are placed inside square brackets i.e., [explanation].

Khomeini's fatwa against Rushdie and a vocal critic of the established Muslim organizations operating in the UK (which he criticised for failing to organise politically British Muslims). The Parliament was envisioned as a body that would represent Muslims as a distinctive political community. In Siddiqui's words, the Parliament was to be "a 'political system' in every sense and meaning of that term" that would transform "the disparaged Muslim minority in Britain into a political community with a will and a purpose of its own" (inaugural address, 1992). For the Parliament, other Muslim groups' commitments to British political structures compromised their ability to represent Islam. Indeed, Siddiqui asserted that the ideological autonomy of the Parliament meant that it (and only it) "responds to only one identity at all times - that of Islam" (*The Muslim News*, 31 May 1996, p.4). The Parliament's project was to establish "an independent political and economic infrastructure, external to the context of party politics and capable of exerting power and influence with regard to Muslim affairs" ("Election special - boycotting the polls. Election time - launching a community-wide debate," *The Muslim News*, no. 94, 28th Feb. 1997, p. 5) and it called upon British Muslims to reject UK party and Parliamentary processes. Participating in a newspaper debate with those advocating electoral participation (as party candidates and voters) the Parliament's Deputy Leader maintained that

> When becoming politically active, in a secular environment, we must follow a method in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah, not the political parties. You cannot be loyal to the Labour party and God at the same time. You cannot become integrated into an ungodly and unjust political system, and at the same time serve God and bring justice. There is a very simple principle in Islam, "no man can serve two masters". This is exactly what was meant when the Prophet (peace be upon Him) rejected the offer of the Quraish to make him head of their order in Makkah. This does not mean that Muslims cannot live under an unIslamic system. The Prophet clearly did so in Makkah and accepted the protection of certain tribes, for a time. He and his Companions lived and organised as a distinct community with their own identity and pursued their own agenda. They would interact with Makkan society, but never integrate in to it.
>
> "And why you should not" – a reply to "Why you should exercise your vote," *Q-News*, no. 255-259, 14th March 1997, p. 27.

He continued with a reference to when Muhammad sent his followers to Christian Abyssinia for protection before the foundation of Madinah and asserted that these Muslims remained a separate community and that now, as

then, independent organization was crucial for the collective negotiation of treaties or pacts with non-Islamic others[2]. As he put it, the Muslim minority "negotiated protection from the Christian emperor Negus" but

> remained a distinct community. This principle of being a separate community within a political order with a pact (*dhamma*) for protection was later applied under the Uthmaniyah Khilafah. Christians and Jews were allowed to organise themselves and remain separate communities with their own leadership. Our policy must be the same; yes to interaction, no to integration. It is only by generating power ourselves that we will change our condition. ( ) We must learn to use the power of organization and protest. Let us start by not voting.

Referring to the Makkan period, the same author argued elsewhere that the Prophet "made sure that Muslims remained outside the social and political order of Makkah and remained independently organised under his leadership. This ensured that their ideas and thinking would remain pure and not become confused and contaminated by the values of Jahiliyyah" (which can be crudely translated as a state of pre-Islamic ignorance) ("The 1997 British General Election - should Muslims vote?" *The Muslim News*, no 95, 28th March, 1997, p.5). The author then construed party voting in British elections as inviting just such a contamination:

> The political parties want to deal with us on a one-to-one basis. This way, they will have no obligation or commitment to the [Muslim] community, and in turn the community remains divided. ( ) If the Muslim community were organized, it would be possible to negotiate from a position of strength with a political party for the genuine demands of the community. We should not vote as individuals; instead we should organize the Muslim vote as a single community.

In other words, if contemporary Muslims were to live up to the Prophet's example of achieving interaction without integration, Muslims' boycott of the election and their identification with the Parliament's project was essential. Only this would allow negotiation of a pact (*dhamma*) from a position of ideological and institutional autonomy and strength and so secure a proper Muslim presence in the public sphere.

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[2] The activist uses the term *dhamma* to refer to such pacts. Lewis, Pellat and Schacht (1965) refer to *dhimma* as the term 'used to designate the sort of indefinitely renewed contract through which the Muslim community accords hospitality and protection to members of other revealed religions'. Differences in the spelling of such terms are commonplace.

Another activist (associated with a different, but in key respects similar organisation) also seeking to persuade Muslims against voting, portrayed the invitation to vote as an attempt to subvert Muslim identity. Referring to the invitations and promises of the non-Muslim *Quraysh* in Makkah the article continued: "Just as modern day politicians attempt to undermine our Islamic identity with half-baked promises to secure our vote ( ) the *Quraysh* even went so far as to offer Muhammad considerable wealth." Just as Muhammad rejected such incorporation so too must contemporary Muslims and this call for an election boycott was further grounded through reference to Muslim experiences in Abyssinia:

> There is a direct analogy with our situation here in Britain concerning participation in a struggle for power in a non-Islamic land. This occurred when some Muslims sought asylum from the oppression of the *Quraysh* in Abyssinia who were ruled over by the Negus. The Abyssinians revolted against Negus due to his leniency to the Muslims and challenged his rule. Ja'far bin Abi Talib, who led the migrants, and his companions did not interfere in any way in this power struggle. They could have easily put their voice (their vote) with the Negus which would have been of obvious benefit to them. Instead, they remained silent on this issue as was indicated by the Prophet. They stayed in Abyssinia without participating in local power struggles until the Islamic state was declared in Madinah and they then migrated to it. The clear message here is that such affairs like voting in elections do not concern us and whatever apparent benefit may be perceived by doing so is irrelevant to the correct way for change.
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> "Voting in non-Islamic election: a sinful diversion," *The Muslim News*, no. 94, 28th Feb. 1997, p. 5.

Anti-boycott invocations of Prophetic experience. We turn now to other activists also concerned about British Muslims' socio-political marginalisation. However, their conceptions of British Muslims' interests and how they could be realised were very different to those above. Most strikingly they urged Muslims to participate fully in British society and articulated this project through rather different identity constructions. Thus, one (associated with the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs) maintained "we have a duty to work for the general welfare and interests of people as a whole and not just of Muslims. As citizens of Britain, our duty is the same as our duty as Muslims. To perform that duty it follows that we are not and cannot be a ghetto community. We are and must be an outwards looking community. We need to interact with people – people of different faith and no faith". This identity definition was developed through the examples of both Prophet Yusuf and Muhammad:

> We derive this understanding of duty from what our Prophets were required to do and did. The story of the Prophet Yusuf (upon whom be peace) is told in great detail in the Qur'an. He was sold into slavery and ended up in the court of the Pharaoh where he was subjected to various trials, including seduction and imprisonment. He maintained his integrity and when famine and drought threatened the people, he took charge of the most important office in the pagan Pharaoh's government. He did not wait for the ruler and people to renounce their paganism before acting. He moved swiftly and served the people, fulfilling their essential needs and rescuing them from starvation. He did not remain aloof. We look also to similar examples in the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) ( ) When the Prophet arrived in predominantly non-Muslim Yathrib [another name for Medina] after the *hijrah* [migration from Makkah], his first instruction to his companions was to spread the greeting of peace and attend to the welfare of the people.
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> "Why you should exercise your vote," *Q-News*, no. 255-259, 14th March 1997, p. 26.

The significance of these Prophetic examples was emphasised when he asked "What has this to do with Muslims voting for candidates in general or local elections in Britain?" and concluded that it implied a duty to ensure the election of candidates with "a genuine concern for the human condition and for equitable dealing". He continued, Muslims "should not opt out of the political life of the country and voluntarily give up their social and political rights. Neither should they surrender their duty to make their opinions and advice known on matters that concern themselves and the wider society." Far from boycotting the election and distancing themselves from the established political process, Muslim identity (grounded through Prophetic example) demanded active participation.

Another activist referred to the period when the Prophets Muhammad and Yusuf were leaders of minorities in Makkah and Egypt, and concluded that:

> Islam exists to serve mankind, with or without an Islamic State. In Makkah, countless verses were revealed on feeding the poor and freeing slaves. These were not necessarily Muslims, they were humans. ( ) There are numerous Islamic examples of Muslim involvement in non-Muslim governments. The most beautiful is that of Prophet Yusuf. It is worth noting that this young man who was imprisoned and mistreated, seized the moment when it was right and expressed readiness to take charge of the most important office in the Pharaoh's government, believing it was his duty to rescue many nations threatened by famine and drought. He did not wait for the Egyptian people to renounce paganism and embrace his

> Unitarian religion so as to form the foundation for an Islamic government. What that young man had in mind was the fact that religion had come to serve the people and fulfil their essential needs. Yusuf had the conviction that rescuing the people could not wait. He saw that he was able to help, and he did help.
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> "The 1997 Elections and the British Muslims,"
> *Trends* 7, no. 3 (1997), pp. 23-25

Here again, the Prophet's aiding of non-Muslims in Makkah and the example of Prophet Yusuf are construed so as to define Muslim identity in very different ways from those such as the Parliament. Whereas the latter called upon Muslims to achieve a particular presence in the public sphere through institutional and ideological autonomy, the former called upon Muslims to achieve a very different presence through full participation in British institutions. The key point is that the meaning of Muslim identity is constructed in the context of contemporary debates about Muslims' action. Common cultural resources are interpreted strategically to promote divergent forms of action with the intention of bringing into being quite different social relationships.

Discussion

We started this paper with recent moves broadening the concept of citizenship to include discussion of claims-making relating to the public expression of diverse collective identities. Such claims unsettle many traditional (individualistic) assumptions concerning citizenship. They also unsettle several assumptions about collective identities. Whereas it is all too easy to assume that collective identities and their meanings or contents are fixed givens, there is evidence that such identities are constructed in the context of contemporary arguments about communities' interests, needs, rights and their relationship with others. Furthermore, as should be apparent from our analysis, these contemporary debates have a profoundly practical dimension. That is, identity definitions are constructed in the context of organising collective action and negotiating intergroup relations.

The wider implication of this emphasis upon the contemporary construction of identity should be readily apparent. At a time when Muslims are increasingly construed in homogenising and essentialising terms it is important to observe that our data illustrate the point that far from Muslims simply "acting out" a given identity there is contestation about what it means to be a Muslim. Indeed, our data illustrate the point that there is "nothing called "Islam" which can speak for itself; there are only "Muslims", practitioners of Islam who attempt to speak for it" and they do not speak with one voice

(Goddard, 2002, p. 4).

Yet, if there is no singular conception of how "a good Muslim" should act in relation to the non-Muslim majority in Britain, this does not mean that those participating in these debates accepted that there was a multiplicity of "Islams". Rather, they all bemoaned the lack of consensus amongst British Muslims and held up their own construction of Muslim identity as authentic (and their programme of action as prototypical). The coexistence of a multiplicity of versions of Muslim identity alongside the idea of a singular Muslim identity illustrates the importance of viewing identity definition as controversial. Identities are never defined in a vacuum but are always constructed in a context of controversy where others articulate alternatives (as Billig, 1987, observes, people rarely address themselves to issues on which there is no dissent or alternative). Furthermore, these debates are worth entering into (and therefore exist) because they have consequences. According to SCT, group members act in terms of their group identity through conforming to the ingroup stereotype and it therefore follows that those seeking to build support for any form of collective action should do so through advancing strategically organized identity constructions (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Even the most important stories that a community tells about itself (its myths) are shaped by the context of their rhetorical use and must not be reified or construed as a fixed determinant of action (Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Tudor, 1972).

In important ways an anti-essentialist perspective challenges those who would construe Britain's Muslims as a fundamentally alien Other. Yet, this same perspective can be read as undermining multiculturalist celebrations of diversity and the broader conceptions of citizenship that they imply. Several have observed that anti-essentialist perspectives encourage scepticism about all claims concerning difference and identities: perhaps if all is constructed, it follows that there is no essential foundation upon which identity and difference can be defended. Thus, Isin and Wood caution that contemporary social scientific perspectives can be "be exclusionary when every effect of group identification is criticised for its essentialism" (Isin & Wood, 1999, p. 17). In similar vein, Modood (1998) observes that "what promised to be an emancipatory, progressive movement seems to make, with its 'deconstruction' of the units of collective agency (people, minorities, the oppressed and so on), all political mobilisation rest on mythic and dishonest unities" (p. 381).

These are complex issues and entail questions about the concept of identity itself. Many analyses characterise contemporary events as demonstrating identity to be fragmented, contradictory and shifting. In turn, several have argued that "identity" is so weighed down by essentialist baggage that it no longer serves any analytic purpose in capturing such dynamism (a sophisti-

cated review of these arguments appears in Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Yet others, working with more individualistic assumptions, may be tempted to conclude that the variability in the salience and meaning of collective identity raises doubts about the capacity of such identities to command psychological commitment and investment. If collective identities are so contingent, perhaps those interested in citizenship have no choice but to return to more individualistic conceptualisations of identity (and more individualistic analyses of citizenship)? Such a logic is particularly likely if group identifications are construed as in some sense "lesser" than personal or individual identities. Once probed, perhaps all talk of collective identity is rather artificial and meaningless?

The Analytic Utility of "Collective Identity"

With regard to these latter observations, it is appropriate to note that self-categorisation theory (SCT) does not view group identities as any less real than personal identities. Rather than implying a dichotomy between group and personal identities in which social processes are only relevant to the former, the theory conceives of identification (at whatever degree of abstraction) as socially determined and as "equally 'real' and just as much a reflection of a person's 'true' self" (Haslam, 2001, p. 46). Furthermore, one could argue that identity (at whatever level of abstraction) is crucial for action. People cannot orient to others unless they can define those others, themselves and the relationship between these entities, and SCT offers important insights into the dynamics through which self-definition varies and people are able to represent the changing social field and their place in it. From this perspective there is a psychological reality to the processes of identification and there is considerable evidence that it can result in action in accordance with group members' ingroup stereotype.

However, none of this implies that that we can assume the existence of particular identities and Brubaker and Cooper (2000) are certainly right to warn of the dangers of uncritical readings of the term "identity" and how these may lead us to assume the existence of identities. As we observed earlier, we cannot make assumptions about non-activists' identification as "Muslim". Nor can we assume that the debates hinted at here have any resonance with those who may on occasion define themselves as, (amongst many other things), "Muslim". How one conceives of oneself is a site of ongoing transformation and contestation and we regard our activists' rhetoric as having a performative, constitutive dimension that may bring into being the collective identifications that are constructed. For these reasons research needs to address the social psychological processes of identification.

Yet, even if this accepted and we take processes of identification seriously, it may be suggested that the diversity and heterogeneity amongst these activists evidences such a degree of fragmentation that any talk of a Muslim community is an empirical fiction. Perhaps the diversity to be found between activists actually confirms the absence of any sense of a Muslim community? However, it is clear that this diversity is within a common frame of reference and that debate does not necessarily signal the absence of any sense of commonality. Indeed, unless the idea of community is potent, it is hard to see why people should devote so much energy to arguing about their commonality. The logic to SCT emphasises this point. According to the theory, social self-categorisations motivate an expectation of agreement with ingroup members and encourage an active striving to reach agreement on identity-related issues. That is, there is a process of consensualisation. However, this does not rule out dissensus. Rather, an empirical reality of dissensus and argument can co-exist alongside the dynamic of consensualisation (Sani & Reicher, 1998). Indeed, the idea of commonality encourages dispute as to the nature of that commonality. Or, to put it in the language of self-categorisation theory, consensualisation provides the impetus towards dissensus (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

Construction and Essentialism

Another issue concerns the practices of essentialism. It is not only Western representations of the Other which imply a timeless fixity to Muslim identity. Muslim activists can also do so. Indeed, unless they did so they would be severely hampered in asserting their (and their programme's) group prototypicality and in organising collective action. Unless the constructed nature of religious identity is obscured and identity definitions given a semblance of transhistorical fixity and substance they are unlikely to motivate group members' psychological investment and form a basis for mobilising collective sentiment and action. Similar points may be made in relation to national identities (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). From this vantage point, just as racist exclusion and murder are dependent on "collective objectifications" so too may claims for citizenship rights and multiculturalist agendas (Werbner, 1997, p. 229). Yet, does not an anti-essentialist perspective lead us to problematise such rhetoric too? In some respects, yes: as we have demonstrated the reality is one of contestation. However, equating ingroup and outgroup members' talk about the singular and timeless nature of a particular collective identity is problematic. Indeed, there is the danger that in doing so we, as Werbner puts it, "essentialise essentialism" (p. 249). As she observes, there is a world of difference between self-essentialising as "a mode of

reflexive imagining" that is "constitutive of self and subjectivity" and is culturally empowering, and racist reifications which are "fixed and immutable" (p. 248). Whereas the latter constitute a form of "misrecognition", the former are necessary elements of self-definition.

These observations may be developed. In exclusionary characterisations of Muslim identity, the essentialist fixing of identity is geared to mobilise a non-Muslim constituency against Britain's Muslims. That is, this essentialism functions to render the latter an object of others' judgement and action. Moreover, it functions to deny minority group agency. As we saw in the example from the BNP, rather than being participants in a process of deliberation upon their relationships with others, Muslims are constituted as necessarily occupying a specific relationship (that of an aggressive alien presence). "Good" Muslims must necessarily reject all identification with Britain and constitute a threat. Furthermore, in this essentialist characterisation, Muslims' own opinions are irrelevant. All that matters is the appeal of this category construction to the non-Muslim audience to which it is addressed.

Yet, if we consider Muslims' own rhetoric concerning their definition we find things to be rather different. Here we find creativity and innovation with Prophetic example being interpreted in the light of contemporary practical dilemmas and mobilisations. Furthermore, the opinion of other ingroup members is far from irrelevant. Activists' talk of a singular Muslim identity and a singular way of expressing this identity is directed to group members and if it is to be consequential depends upon these latter's judgements. Rather than being mere objects of another's construction, minority group members are participants in the ongoing collective process of ingroup deliberation and collective self-definition. Furthermore, it should be noted that although activists may employ cultural commonplaces and myths so as to attribute group identity a particular transhistorical "essence", the audience to which such arguments are delivered is often culturally empowered. That is, the cultural resources that activists employ to ground their constructions are typically shared by their ingroup audience. Indeed, if they were not, they would not serve any communicative function. The important point is that just as activists can employ the commonplaces of culture in diverse ways, so too can their non-activist audiences. Far from being passive recipients of activists' constructions, they are active participants in self-definition. Just as activists envisioning various forms of intergroup relations may be able to develop varied constructions of Prophetic example, so too may non-activists. The importance of this dynamic contestation cannot be overestimated. As Werbner (1996) observes, ethnic empowerment has as much to do with the creation and reproduction of "autonomous ethnic spaces" (where minorities can deliberate and contest their communal identification) as it has with penetrating the wider public sphere (p. 55). Indeed, if as Delanty (2002) observes

"the power to name, create meaning, construct personal biographies and narratives by gainning control over the flow of information, goods and cultural processes is an important dimension of citizenship as an active process" (p. 64), it is clear that such autonomous ingroup deliberation is a crucial feature of broader conceptions of citizenship.

Of course, the dynamic of ingroup debate is not necessarily fully democratic. Access to the Muslim public sphere (like all public spheres) is undoubtedly constrained by a variety of factors. However, debate and the potential for contestation certainly exists and is testimony to the intellectual vibrancy to be found amongst Britain's Muslims as they deliberate upon their contemporary social relations with others.

A Caveat

The present paper's scope is clearly limited. Whilst we have explored identity construction and contestation we have said nothing about factors affecting the ways in which "ordinary" Muslims may come to identify with particular identity constructions. Nor have we addressed the issue of how identity definitions are enacted in concrete forms of collective action and how these restructure social relations or otherwise affect the public expression of minority identities. Clearly, such issues are important if we are to have a fuller understanding of minority groups' agency. So too we need to study factors affecting majority group reactions to such collective enactments. Inevitably, these latter are complex. As Staerklé, Roux, Delay, Gianettoni and Perrin (2003) show, different conceptions of societal structure and social relations (specifically, "consensus-based" and "conflict-based" representations) may have profound implications for people's conceptualisation of citizenship and the reception of identity-related claims-making. In turn, we need analyses of how popular conceptions of citizenship and rights develop (e.g., in relation to "new" post-national institutions and discourses: see Sanchez-Mazas et al., 2003; Soysal, 2000). Furthermore, we need to develop normative principles relevant to such responses. Just as some majority group self-definitions may be exclusionary or otherwise problematic so minority group self-definitions may conceivably support practices that others judge problematic. Inevitably therefore, normative notions of citizenship must provide criteria for judging particularistic claims and the granting of differential rights (Purvis & Hunt, 1999).

The development of such normative criteria takes us way beyond the discipline of psychology and into the realms of political philosophy. However, whilst attempts to develop normative criteria are important, the dynamic to identity construction implies that it will be impossible to anticipate all even-

tualities. The contents to particular identities, the demands that they articulate, and the degree to which these identity constructions secure ingroup support, cannot be prescribed (Purvis & Hunt, 1999). As the outcome of particular and contemporary relations of argument, they are always in flux and so must test the adequacy of any system of normative criteria. This underlines the importance of investigating the dynamic of identity construction in contemporary settings and the relevance of social psychological analyses of collective mobilisation. Furthermore, in studying the contingencies and dynamics whereby particular identity constructions are produced, adopted, transformed, shape collective action, are received by majority group members etc., social psychologists would be studying processes that lie at the heart of the democratic process. As Purvis and Hunt observe, "the universal pretensions of citizenship are forever destined to clash with the particular aspirations arising from the complex heterogeneity of civil society. This is a paradox to which there is no permanent solution. Nor should we seek such permanence, for it is precisely through the contest between these two that the boundaries of the political are contested and resolved. In this paradox – in the struggle to achieve an always contestable equilibrium of compromise between universality and particularity – resides the very precondition of democracy. If a solution to this paradox were to be found this would render democracy, indeed politics, redundant". (p. 476).

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