

Combating Extremism among British Muslim Youth

Sarah Sladen

In 2007, the British government's Communities Secretary, Ruth Kelly, joined Muslim community leaders in Bradford to launch the Nasiha Citizenship Project, the country's first ever citizenship curriculum for Madrassahs. The project was developed by the Bradford Council of Mosques (BCM) in partnership with the UK government, and comes in response to an independent study into radicalism in local Muslim communities by researchers at Durham University. They suggested a change in traditional religious leadership was needed to tackle extremism and to counter messages about perceived clashes between Islam and British culture.¹ "Nasiha" means "guidance," and the curriculum draws from the Quran, Shariah law, and traditional Muslim scholarship to show that British laws are in harmony with Islamic values. The project aims to better connect with young Muslims and provide them with the knowledge and ideas to confront and withstand extremist messages. According to the Nasiha website, the project's objective is to teach young British Muslims, between the ages of eight and fourteen, "...to know their sacred roles and responsibilities in the societies we live and interact in."² Ten Muslim clerics have been teaching the lessons in six Madrassahs (which in Britain are usually unregulated after-school programs based in mosques or private homes) and a school in Bradford — a religiously diverse city about

¹ Choudhury Tufyal, *The Role of Identity Politics in Radicalization - a Study in Progress* (London: Crown Copyright, 2007).

² Nasiha Citizenship Foundation (NCF) Website, <http://www.nasiha.co.uk/>.

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200 miles north of London. An estimated 500 students have already completed the course versions of which the Government's Communities Department hopes to roll out nationally.³

The Nasiha project is part of some of the biggest changes to British citizenship policy in nearly forty years. The changes are shaped by a revaluation of multiculturalism in Britain that is driven by increased migration and a post 9/11 international agenda focused on global terrorism. These changes include the recasting of citizenship laws according to security considerations,⁴ and a revaluation of citizenship focused on young British Muslims who are increasingly regarded as the center of the multicultural problem.⁵ The Nasiha Citizenship project can be understood as an embodiment of this new multicultural paradigm in Britain. This paper is focused on the recent changes to British citizenship policy and what they mean for British Muslim youth. More specifically, it asks 1) what is driving the changes to citizenship policy and concepts of multiculturalism in Britain and 2) in what ways are British Muslim youth affected by these changes? I argue that while the Nasiha curriculum emphasizes positive civic engagement and has the potential to offer young people a space to engage in discussion about identity and belonging, the thrust of the program is fundamentally problematic. Nasiha and the larger citizenship agenda that frames the project both emphasize the role of Islamic teaching as the root of British Muslim radicalization. In so doing, the pervasive social and economic pressures confronting young British Muslims are not incorporated into mainstream discourse. Without accompanying efforts to address community marginalization that stems from racial and increasingly religious (Islamophobic) discrimination, as well as related economic issues such as underemployment and un-

³ "Imams to give citizenship lessons," *BBC News Online*, http://news.bc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/education/6665317.

⁴ L. Fekete, "Anti-Muslim racism and the European security state," in *Race and Class*, 46, (2004) 3-29; Dominic Casciani, "A new way to earn UK citizenship," *BBC News*, February 20, 2008, http://new.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/hi/uk_news/politics/7254926.stm.

⁵ Tahir Abbas, "Recent Developments to British Multicultural Theory, Policy & Practice: The Case of British Muslims," *Citizenship Studies*, 9, no. 2, (2005): 153-166.

derinvestment in schools and housing, Britain's new citizenship policies have the potential to deepen the divides between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Britain. Further, the responses by young British Muslims to these pressures should not be understood as driven by either religion on the one hand or socioeconomic issues on the other. Young people experience and negotiate these pressures in a variety of ways. There are rich debates taking place within the British Muslim community and especially among British Muslim youth about what it means to be a British Muslim.

The paper begins with an overview of the evolving debate on migration, citizenship, and multiculturalism in Britain. It then examines how these evolving concepts have been rethought in the post-September 11th and 7/7 era with a focus on how young British Muslims are especially impacted by these changes. The paper compares how the British government has chosen to frame the challenge of Muslim extremism to the socioeconomic experience of British Muslims, and of British Muslim youth in particular. The discussion then turns its attention to the Nasiha project as a product of Britain's new citizenship agenda. The paper concludes with an examination of how the diversity of views and experiences among Muslim youth are marginalized by a citizenship agenda based on an increasingly monocultural model. Beyond problematic stereotypes of jihadi Muslim youth who resist integration and seek violence, British Muslim youth are ignored by mainstream media that continues to perpetuate broad generalizations about the British Muslim community and Islam. The participation of Muslim youth (and youth in general) in the difficult task of managing diversity will be crucial for the success of all states. What is needed is a more careful examination of how young people are the focus of and experience dominant global security discourses since these increasingly influence government's social policy agendas.

Migration, Citizenship, & Multiculturalism in Britain

Most immigrants and refugees to Europe have come from Middle Eastern and North African states. At present, there are more than 23 million Muslim immigrants in Europe. In the United Kingdom, a 2001 census placed the British Muslim population at 1.6 million. Although

there has been a Muslim presence in the UK since the early nineteenth century, the growth of the Muslim population began in earnest in the post-World War II period when Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Indians immigrated to Britain to fill the labor shortage in the country's industrial cities. Two-thirds of the British Muslim population originates in South Asia. In the 1990s, a second influx of Muslim refugees came to the UK from Bosnia and Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Somalia. Forty-six percent of all Muslims living in the UK are British born, however, and Muslims comprise the second largest non-Christian religious group at 2.7 percent, as well as the youngest, with one-third of Muslims under the age of fifteen.⁶

The rise of migration over the course of the twentieth century has led Western liberal democracies to grapple with how to manage their diverse ethnic minority populations. European states have taken different approaches to the treatment of their minority populations that range from aggressive assimilation to policies "...that border on benign neglect."⁷ In Britain, successive governments have shaped policy and practice toward ethnic minority groups based on varying strategies of anti-immigration and anti-discrimination legislation; these strategies have been coupled with programs of assimilation, integration, and more recently, multiculturalism. Further, British policies have been accompanied by discourse on minorities that has changed its emphasis over time from color during the 1950s and 1960s, to race in the 1960s until the 1980s, to ethnicity in the 1990s, and in the present day to religion and, more specifically, Islam.⁸ Until quite recently, however, Britain's policies on integration and multiculturalism have shared a common 'laissez-faire approach' based on an underly-

⁶ Office for National Statistics, UK, 2001; Ceri Peace, "Britain's Muslim Population: an Overview," in *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure*, ed. Tahir Abbas (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2005), 19.

⁷ Barbara Franz, "Europe's Muslim Youth: An Inquiry into the Politics of Discrimination, Relative Deprivation, and Identity Formation," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 18, no. 1 (2007): 93-95.

⁸ Ceri Peach, *Ibid*: 18; Chris Allen, "From Race to Religion: the new Face of Discrimination," in *British Muslims: Communities under Pressure*, ed. Tahir Abbas (London: Zed Books, 2005), 78; Stephen Lyon, "In the Shadow of September 11: Multiculturalism and Identity," in *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure*, ed. Tahir Abbas (London: Zed Books, Ltd, 2005).

ing assumption that the assimilation of immigrant groups is inevitable. Beginning in the 1950s with the first wave of African-Caribbean and South Asian economic migrants to the UK, and throughout the 1970s, policy makers assumed that the provision of English language training in schools would be sufficient to ensure immigrants' assimilation into British society. For British Muslims, however, integration has not occurred to the extent that governments envisaged for a number of reasons. One primary factor has been racial hostility that impacts on individual and community potential to integrate socially and economically. British policy makers have also failed to appreciate the extent to which ethnic minority groups must rely on limited group class and ethnic resources to mobilize economic and social development.⁹

Multiculturalism in Britain first emerged as a policy doctrine in the late 1960s in response to the failure of assimilation. It provided a framework for policy makers to recognize and encourage respect for cultural differences, but also resulted in a political process that identified *difference* as the problem, rather than the effects of racism and discrimination. In the late 1970s and into the 1980s, members of ethnic minority communities challenged the 'implicit paternalism' of multiculturalism when anti-racist strategies that included an analysis of justice and power emerged as an alternative and sparked a debate over multicultural versus anti-racist approaches.¹⁰ Critics of multiculturalism argued that the policy overlooked the pervasive inequality stemming from racial discrimination and injustice in Britain.¹¹ Advocates of anti-racist strategies argued that they included multicultural education but went further by incorporating issues of systematic inequality.¹² For British Muslims, the racial equality discourse in Britain

⁹ Tahir Abbas, *Ibid*, 2005: 160; Muhammad Anwar, "Issues, Policy & Practice," in *Muslim Britain: Communities under Pressure*, ed. Tahir Abbas (London: Zed Books, 2005), 31.

¹⁰ Sivanandan cited in Will Kymlicka, *Immigration, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism: Exploring the Links* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003); Tahir Abbas, "Recent Developments to British Multicultural Theory, Policy & Practice: The Case of British Muslims," *Citizenship Studies*, 9, no. 2, (2005): 153-166.

¹¹ H. Ousley, *Community Pride, no Prejudice – the Ousley Report on Bradford* (Bradford: Bradford Vision, 2002).

¹² Sarup cited in Will Kymlicka, *Immigration, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism: Exploring the Link* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

was dominated by the idea that color racism was the primary post-immigration issue and did not incorporate Muslim voices in a significant way until the early 1990s.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, several important developments in multicultural relations occurred that included The Human Rights Act (1998) that extended anti-discrimination legislation to include religion, the Macpherson Report (1999) that identified the pervasive institutional racism within the Metropolitan police and made recommendations to address these issues.¹³ and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000). The publication of the Runnymede Trust's commission report, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (also known as the Parekh Report (2000)) examined the long-term future of Britain as a multicultural nation. The report suggested the need for more "inclusive" descriptions than "Britishness" such as "the community of communities" and "these isles". The report also brought the issues of relative deprivation among the Muslim community into sharper focus. The Parekh Report stirred controversy, however, over whether the concept of "Britishness" was racist. Then Home Secretary, Jack Straw, publicly disassociated himself from the findings of the report and criticized its authors for "...washing their hands of the notion of nationhood."¹⁴

The idea that multiculturalism needed to be reviewed and, according to some, replaced with a greater emphasis on integration, came to the fore following riots in the northern cities of Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in the summer of 2001. The Cantle report, commissioned by the Home Office in response to the violence, said that people in Britain were leading "parallel" and "polarized" lives where people from different backgrounds did not mix. The report called for a meaningful concept of citizenship which could include an oath of allegiance setting out "a clear primary loyalty to this nation."¹⁵ Ques-

¹³ "Race: The Macpherson Report," *BBC News*, May 7, 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/vote2001/hi/english/main_issues/sections/facts/newsid_1190000/1190971.stm.

¹⁴ Ian Burrell, "The Runnymede Report: 'Britishness' is not a racist idea in a multicultural nation, insists Straw," *The Independent*, October 12, 2000, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-5118848.html>.

¹⁵ "Race 'segregation' caused riots," *BBC News*, December 11, 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/1702799.stm.

tions of 'loyalty' and 'Britishness' have acquired an even greater sense of urgency in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11th, and more recently, the July 7th bombings of the London underground. The changing concepts of multiculturalism and citizenship in Britain as a result of these debates identify British Muslims, and especially British Muslim youth as groups at the heart of Britain's multicultural debates.

Rethinking British Multiculturalism & Citizenship in the post-9/11 and 7/7 Era

In the present climate, the focus of multiculturalism is on Muslim and non-Muslim divisions. Across Europe, Muslims have become the focus of government concern and national debates that raise doubts about their willingness and ability to integrate into European society. Of special concern is whether Muslims are committed to what are identified as core European Western liberal values of democracy, freedom, tolerance, sexual equality, and secularism. In particular, since the events of 7/7 when British born Muslims attacked the London underground, multiculturalism has come under severe attack from the right and the left in Britain, and concerns in relation to 'Muslim terrorists' fill the public discourse, fueled largely by the mainstream media.

Arguments against multiculturalism and for integration have been taking place among the left and the right in Britain since the 1970s. In the post-2001 era, however, criticism now comes from the pluralistic center-left as well; those who traditionally rejected dichotomous models of race and class now appear to ascribe to a new model of "us" and "them" in relation to non-Muslim and Muslim divisions. Tariq Modood writes that by 2004, "...it was common to read or hear that the cultural separation and self-segregation of Muslim migrants represented a challenge to Britishness, and that a 'politically-correct' multiculturalism had fostered fragmentation rather than inte-

gration.”¹⁶ Such sentiments were echoed in the civil-society forums, journals, and institutions of the center or liberal left, and took on even greater momentum in the wake of the London 2005 bombings (7/7). Thus, the rhetoric of cultural value used by right-wing anti-immigration politicians such as Nick Griffin, leader of the British National Party, to legitimize their policies and attitudes are now more or less shared by all parties.

Many blame Britain’s multicultural model as responsible for the events of 7/7. In the weeks following the attacks, commentators wrote that the British bombers were the “...consequence of a misguided and catastrophic pursuit of multiculturalism,”¹⁷ and the “...children of Britain’s own multicultural society.”¹⁸ Others who did not directly identify multiculturalism as the cause of the bombings nevertheless argued that Britain’s “...anything goes multiculturalism...[is] focused too much on the ‘multi’ and not enough on the common culture.”¹⁹ Some went further and identified multiculturalism as having devalued British citizenship and must therefore “be discarded as nonsense.”²⁰ At present, although viewpoints on the value and concept of multiculturalism continue to be wide-ranging, the debate in Britain can be broadly understood as belonging to two camps. On the one hand, some commentators argue that in a world of migration, the idea of national citizenship is increasingly obsolete and what is needed is instead a way of assigning rights and responsibilities that are based on international law and human rights norms that does not presuppose immigrants will become ‘national citizens.’²¹

On the other hand, some argue that the increasing ethnic and religious diversity within modern states requires a more active effort by the state to create and promote a common sense of national citizen-

¹⁶ Tariq Modood, “Muslims and the Politics of Difference,” in *Immigration, Citizenship, Multiculturalism: Exploring the Links*, ed. in Will Kymlicka (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) 2.

¹⁷ William Pfaff, “A monster of our own making,” *Observer*, August 21, 2005.

¹⁸ Gilles Kepel, “Europe’s Answer to Londonistan,” *openDemocracy*, August 25, 2005.

¹⁹ Trevor Phillips, “After 7/7: Sleepwalking to segregation,” *Commission for Racial Equality*, September 22, 2005.

²⁰ Martin Wolf, “When multiculturalism is a nonsense,” *Financial Times*, August 31, 2005.

²¹ F. Klug, “Human Rights: a common standard for all peoples?,” in *Reclaiming Britishness*, ed. P. Griffith and M. Leonard (London: Foreign Policy Center, 2002).

ship. In other words, what is needed is a revaluation of national citizenship.²²

The latter is the approach taken by the British government and their policy focuses primarily on young British Muslims. As a result, multiculturalism, a policy that has traditionally promoted some level of community distinction, is today evolving into something that more closely resembles monoculturalism; in Britain, the renewed emphasis on 'community cohesion exemplifies this idea.²³ Notably absent from these debates are voices from within the Muslim community. As such, the experience of British Muslims is not included in a citizenship policy that is supposedly preoccupied with the integration of the British Muslim community.

The British Muslim Experience

Muslim immigrants to Europe and their descendants come from over thirty countries to form a community that is socially, politically, culturally, ethnically, religiously, and economically diverse.²⁴ In other words, the category 'Muslim' is heterogeneous: some Muslims are religiously observant but apolitical, while others are political but do not view their politics as being 'Islamic.' Some Muslims may identify with a nationality of origin, while others may identify more with their place of settlement and citizenship.

Prior to the events of September 11th, the internal diversity of Muslim communities was largely absent in government and media debates over multiculturalism. In the post-September 11th and 7/7 era, this trend continues but has been intensified by the rise of Islamopho-

²² C.W. Watson, *Multiculturalism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003).

²³ Tariq Modood, "Muslims and the Politics of Difference," *Immigration, Citizenship, Multiculturalism: Exploring the Links*, ed. in Will Kymlicka (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003): 101; Will Kymlicka, *Immigration, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism: Exploring the Links* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003); Tahir Abbas, "British Muslim Minorities Today: Challenges and Opportunities to Europeanism, Multiculturalism and Islamism," *Sociology Compass* (2007): 720-736.

²⁴ "An Uncertain Road: Muslims and the Future of Europe," *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life* (October, 2005): 3; "Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia," *European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)*, 2006.

bia in Europe,²⁵ coupled with renewed attention to the concepts of citizenship and multiculturalism that frame these ideas within a security discourse.²⁶ The British government is careful to qualify its action against extremism with carefully phrased statements that reject the 'clash of civilizations' thesis and emphasize its commitment to working in "...partnership with the vast majority of Muslims who reject violence and who share core British values in doing this."²⁷ Despite this, the absence of British Muslim voices sends an implicit message that all Muslims are responsible for the violent actions of an extremist minority.

Tahir Abbas writes that in the present climate, "...it is the experiences of British Muslims that are important to consider, as they are at the sharp end of multiculturalist rhetoric, ideology and philosophy."²⁸ Young people in particular remain the focus of questions related to what it means to be British. The ideal of multicultural citizenship that emerged in the wake of the attacks has increased these pressures. In another context, Barbara Franz writes that "Britain's multicultural tableau has been celebrated without addressing the socioeconomic segregation and other divisions that lie below the surface."²⁹ Indeed, under Britain's multicultural policy, socioeconomic integration has failed to occur for many Muslims. Issues of education, employment, housing, political participation, and religious and racial discrimination and violence all impact the British Muslim experience. Moreover, Muslim communities in Britain have experienced a demographic change with a shift from first-generation migrants to second and third generation, predominantly young British born citizens. This means that the socioeconomic deprivation affecting Muslims disproportionately impacts Muslim youth.

²⁵ "Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia," *European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)*, 2006.

²⁶ L. Fekete, "Anti-Muslim racism and the European security state," *Race and Class*, 46 (2004): 3-29.

²⁷ "Preventing violent extremism - Winning hearts and minds," in *Department for Communities and Local Government (London: Crown Copyright, 2007)*, 4.

²⁸ Tahir Abbas, "Recent Developments to British Multicultural Theory, Policy & Practice: The Case of British Muslims," *Citizenship Studies*, 9, no. 2, (2005): 164.

²⁹ Barbara Franz, "Europe's Muslim Youth: An Inquiry into the Politics of Discrimination, Relative Deprivation, and Identity Formation," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 18, no. 1 (2007): 99.

Socioeconomic Problems Faced by British Muslims

EDUCATION

Research on education reveals that there is a significant gap between the achievement levels of Muslim and non-Muslim children; thirty-six percent of British Muslims drop out of school without qualifications. These differences vary by location and are linked to social class and the length of stay in Britain. In higher education, the proportion of Muslim children is rising in spite of differential acceptance rates between Muslims and whites by British universities (forty percent to fifty-four percent).³⁰ In a 2003 qualitative study on 'State Policies toward Muslim Minorities in the European Union' conducted by researchers Muhammad Anwar and Qadir Bakhsh, members of the Muslim community voiced their concerns about these issues through one-to-one interviews, focus group meetings and two round-table discussions in London and Birmingham. Educational concerns identified by British Muslim respondents include mother-tongue teaching, religious education, provision of *halal* meals, prayer facilities, uniforms for girls, single-sex education, and state funding for Muslim schools. Currently, there are over eighty Muslim independent schools in Britain, but only five receive state funding, whereas several thousand Church of England and Catholic schools, as well as Jewish schools, receive state funding.³¹

Also cited was the need for more Muslim teachers and governors, as well as role models for Muslim pupils in society and schools. Others pointed to "...a lack of understanding of Muslim culture within educational psychology services." Similarly, some respondents identified the "...stereotyping of Muslim pupils and their parents, particularly girls...bullying of Muslim pupils...the Christian bias in religious education, and the misrepresentation and denigration of Islam (Islamophobic religious education lessons)." The problem of Muslim exclusion extended to both students and their parents. Within the Muslim community, problems identified included high rates of illiteracy among the adult Muslim immigrant population, and discouragement

³⁰ Muhammad Anwar and Qadir Bakhsh, "British Muslims & State Policies," *Center for Research on Ethnic Relations* (2003): 32-33.

³¹ *Ibid.*

ment by parents toward their children's academic commitments.³²

EMPLOYMENT

The 2001 UK census revealed that the unemployment rate among Muslims was three times that of the general population.³³ A fifth of sixteen to twenty-four year-old Muslims in Britain are unemployed, and fourteen percent of Muslims over age twenty-five are unemployed (compared with a national unemployment rate of four percent). Among Muslims, those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent had the lowest economic activity rates, a higher proportion of unqualified working-age individuals, and greater numbers living in deprived areas.³⁴ Among working Muslims, forty percent of British Muslims are in low-skill jobs, and nearly seventy percent of Bangladeshi and Pakistani children live in poverty.³⁵ In general, Muslims are employed in older industries and hold menial jobs, have lower incomes, and are vulnerable to unemployment.

In the same 2003 qualitative study by Anwar and Bakhsh, Muslim respondents felt that they were disadvantaged in the workplace, and, as a result, both socially and economically disadvantaged in a society that "...denies status largely by reference to employment." Several respondents identified discrimination against Muslim workers in terms of recruitment and within the workplace, and in particular within public sector employment such as local authorities, government, and the BBC.³⁶ Some respondents felt that a related problem was a lack of understanding of Islam among employers who failed to accommodate Muslim religious needs. Others identified poor education and professional training as negatively affecting their employment opportunities.

³² Ibid: 33.

³³ Office for National Statistics UK, 2001; Robert Winnet and David Leppard, "Britain's Secret Plans to Win Muslim Hearts and Minds," *London Times*, May 30, 2004.

³⁴ "Muslim Hardship under Spotlight," *BBC News*, May 14, 2006; Barbara Franz, "Europe's Muslim Youth: An Inquiry into the Politics of Discrimination, Relative Deprivation, and Identity Formation," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 18, no.1 (2007): 97-99.

³⁵ Madeleine Bunting, "Young, Muslim, and British," *The Guardian*, November 30, 2004.

³⁶ B. Hepple and T. Choudhry, *Tackling Religious Discrimination: Practical Implications for Policy Makers and Legislators* (London: Home Office, 2001).

HOUSING

The employment problems confronting British Muslims strongly correlate with similar housing problems that reflect the relative deprivation of the community. Housing segregation can have negative implications for access and quality of education, as well as health. Housing quality and type varies among British Muslims, with Pakistanis having a higher owner-occupation rate than Bangladeshis (sixty-nine percent compared to thirty-four percent). In contrast, seventy percent of whites lived in owner-occupied homes. Housing conditions include issues such as overcrowding (in forty-three percent of British Muslim homes), the lack of or need to share bathroom facilities, lack of central heating, and whether the accommodation is self-contained. The majority of British Muslims live in inner city, neglected areas where harassment, violence, and racist attacks take place on council estates.³⁷ For British Muslim youth, one in three are coming of age in the most deprived areas.³⁸

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Muslim participation in the political process in Britain has increased in the last twenty years but overall Muslim representation remains low. Out of 659 Members of Parliament, only two are of Muslim origin in the House of Commons, and five in the House of Lords. There is one Muslim member of the European Parliament from Britain, and just over two hundred local Muslim government councilors. There is no Muslim representation in the Greater London Assembly. In general, despite their significant contributions to economic growth, Muslims lack a strong voice in the political process. Although there are no legal barriers in place to prevent Muslim political participation, in general, few Muslim candidates have been put forward by their parties for political office. The low level of representation among Muslims negatively impacts Muslim welfare in terms of their influence on the policies shaping the nation and the relationship between Muslim communities and the country as a whole. As Muhammad Anwar

³⁸ Muhammad Anwar, "Issues, Policy & Practice," in *Muslim Britain: Communities under Pressure*, ed. Tahir Abbas (London: Zed Books, 2005), 37; Barbara Franz, *Ibid*; Madeleine Bunting, *Ibid*.

points out, "...a people without a political voice are a people forced out of the mainstream of national life."³⁹

Racial & Religious Discrimination

Legislation against racial discrimination has existed in Britain for nearly forty years in the form of the 1976 Race Relations Act (Amended in 2000). The act extends protection against racial discrimination by public authorities and, as part of the 2000 amendment to the act, places an enforceable positive duty on public authorities. Despite the existence of such legislation, Muslims and other ethnic minorities continue to experience racial and religious discrimination and violence. Further, with the exception of two religious groups following case law—Sikhs and Jews—the 1976 Race Relations Act does not fully protect Muslims because it does not outlaw religious discrimination. The experience of religious and racial discrimination is a central issue for Britain's younger generation of Muslims. In the 2003 study by Anwar and Bakhsh, questions relating to religious and racial discrimination drew the greatest number of responses from young people. An overwhelming majority said that they experienced discrimination in their daily lives, and some referred specifically to 'Islamophobia' as the primary form of discrimination. In general, 'Islamophobia' is on the rise in Britain and across Europe.⁴⁰ Young British Muslims are experiencing discrimination in schools, while others encounter racist violence against their businesses and places of worship. Incidents of harassment against Muslim women and children by skinheads and members of the British far right organization, the British National Party have also been reported. Many Muslims voice concern about the overwhelmingly negative portrayal of Muslims and the misrepresentation of Islam in the media.⁴¹ Overall, many Muslim respondents noted that the violence and discrimination had

³⁹ Anwar, Ibid: 38.

⁴⁰ "Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia," *European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)*, 2006.

⁴¹ Paul Weller, Alice Feldman and Kingsley, *Religious Discrimination in England and Wales* (London: Home Office Research, 2001).

increased since September 11th.⁴²

New Multiculturalism, British Muslim Youth, & Nasiha

Clearly, the external and internal forces affecting British Muslims are wide-ranging and complex, and were in place well before the Northern riots, September 11th, and the July bombings. In the aftermath of these events and in light of the global "War on Terror," the problems facing British Muslim youth must be rethought. Young British Muslims increasingly find themselves simultaneously pulled by the forces of radicalization, secularization, and liberalization. Many Muslim youth want the same things that all young people want: to fit in and be accepted by their peers, while still retaining their religious traditions and cultural practices. Many Muslim youth are comfortable negotiating multiple identities that include the more conservative world of their parents and the secular world outside their homes. Challenges to sustaining multiple identities come from both non-Muslim and Muslim communities, which can lead to double alienation for Muslim youth.⁴³

As the discussion above demonstrates, Muslim youth experience discrimination in social, religious, and political spheres of life. Resource disparity, job discrimination, and a growing sense among young Muslims that Islam is singled out and held to a different standard than other religions through public and media discourse has resulted in feelings of alienation from the societies in which they live. The relative lack of public Muslim role models or authority figures results in Muslim youth's underrepresentation in secular venues such as popular culture or national politics. In addition to socioeconomic issues, within their communities Muslim youth often encounter parental pressure to adopt one identity. As a result, some Muslim young people lead parallel lives in which they jump between identities depending on whether they are inside or outside the home. For Muslim youth who more closely identify with their European citizenship ra-

⁴² Muhammad Anwar, Muhammad and Qadir Bakhsh, "British Muslims & State Policies," *Center for Research on Ethnic Relations*, University of Warwick (2003).

⁴³ Adi Greif, "Double Alienation and Muslim Youth in Europe," *United States Institute of Peace USIPeace Briefing* (Washington: USIP Press, 2007): 2.

ther than their parents' countries of origin, but are pressured to act in ways not accepted by their European peers, "...[they] can feel isolated and alienated from both European societies and internal communities."⁴⁴

When it comes to the changing concepts of citizenship and multiculturalism, these pressures have acquired a new level of intensity for British Muslim youth. Externally, domestic politics in Britain have come to be dominated by an international agenda that is focused on global terrorism and the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. Internally, young British Muslims find themselves in the position of having to choose between being Islamic or being British. Thus, British Muslim youth are being impacted by both radical Islamic politics and by British multicultural citizenship. The resulting tensions lead some young people to become more radicalized on the one hand or seek to become more westernized on the other.⁴⁵ Between these two positions of course exists a wide spectrum of experiences and responses by British Muslim youth. In general, however, young Muslims feel that they are "...in practice second class citizens" and that their parents have tolerated racial and religious discrimination, "...perhaps as the price of settling in Britain." It is also clear that young Muslims are not prepared to accept these problems and that, unless they begin to receive equal treatment, tensions are likely to grow between Muslim young people and non-Muslims in Britain.⁴⁶ The riots in Oldham, Burnley, and Bradford in the summer of 2001 were a manifestation of these frustrations.

In the UK and elsewhere, questions of identity and socioeconomic deprivation are central aspects of daily life for Muslim youth. The growing number of university-educated Muslim youth has created a generation keenly aware of the gaps that exist between their communities and Britain's indigenous white communities. In her comparative study on Muslim youth in the UK, France, and Germany, Barbara

⁴⁴ Fulat Shareefa, Director of *Muslim Youth Helpline* cited in Adi Greif, "Double Alienation and Muslim Youth in Europe," *United States Institute of Peace USIPeace Briefing* (Washington: USIP Press, 2007); "Big Dominique and his struggle against the Islamists," *The Economist*, December 18, 2004.

⁴⁵ Tahir Abbas, "Recent Developments to British Multicultural Theory, Policy & Practice: The Case of British Muslims," *Citizenship Studies*, 9, no. 2, (2005) 5.

⁴⁶ Anwar, *Ibid*: 46.

Franz argues that the experience of continued discrimination and relative deprivation compared to members of mainstream society "...might entice individuals who seem perfectly integrated to find elucidation for their resentments within other realms of existence; extremist Islam is one such way."⁴⁷ She points out that it is therefore no accident that radical Islamist movements find recruits among the young, college-educated, and British born.

The Nasiha Citizenship Project

According to the British government, it is a lack of understanding of Islam that violent extremists seek to exploit among young British Muslims. The government's immediate priorities therefore include the provision of citizenship education in supplementary schools and Madrassahs that would ensure the "...the most effective use of the education system in promoting faith understanding." Enter the Nasiha Citizenship Foundation (NCF), a charity aimed at providing Islamic Citizenship teaching resources for Imams, teachers, parents, and students in both Madrassahs and schools. NCF offers training in teaching and delivery of citizenship materials based on Islam as well as capacity building.

The lessons that form the core of the Nasiha curriculum include for example, one lesson entitled 'Oath of Peace' in which Muslim students "...learn the importance of living in the UK, respecting its laws and abiding here peacefully." Other examples include 'Islam and Suicide Bombings' (students learn which verses of the Quran are used to justify that suicide bombings are forbidden in Islam); 'Loving Humanity and Avoiding Hatred' (the lesson aims to teach that hating people is disapproved of in Islam and that the Islamic position of a Muslim is to pray for the welfare of humanity as a whole); 'Anti-social behavior' (students are taught about responsible behavior in public and the harms of anti-social behavior); 'Community Work and Elections' (becoming part of a wider society, interacting within the local community to facilitate success and harmony); 'Earning a Living' (lessons that teach the importance of earning a living in a respectful, de-

⁴⁷ Franz, Ibid: 99.

cent and honest way, and to avoid earning by fraud, deception, or illegal activity); 'Controlling Anger' (students learn that becoming angry/frustrated and losing one's temper can result in harm, either verbally or physically. Students learn how to manage their anger); and 'Good Muslim Good Citizen' (Students learn the similarities of being a good citizen and a good Muslim).⁴⁸

The thrust of the Nasiha curriculum is to teach Muslim children in Madrassahs how to steer clear of extremism, but its lessons are not without controversy. An Associated Press article posted shortly after the launch of NCF outlined one of the project's initial lesson plans in which a group of Islamic extremists want to buy fertilizer that could be used to make a bomb. The lesson asks whether the shopkeeper should sell it to them, even if she suspects it will be used for a holy war? Another example includes a story about a fictional character Ahmad, whose jihadi friends want to attack a local supermarket in retaliation for the war in Iraq. The lesson asks whether is it right for Ahmad to harm innocent Britons just because their government invaded a Muslim country? The curriculum's answer in both cases is, of course, "No", but the use of these kinds of scenarios has raised concern among some Muslim educators who question whether they are appropriate for young students. In the same news article, Tahir Alam, chair of the Muslim Council of Britain's education committee, remarked that, "...in an educational setting, those propositions are a bit stark." Some also feel insulted that the NCF appears to make the assumption that Britain's Muslim religious schools are the breeding ground for Islamic terrorists.

At the time of the launch, the British government acknowledged that the curriculum raised sensitive issues, but said that they were needed to give Muslims the practical skills they require to reject extremism. The program's project manager, Sajid Hussain, agrees: "...they were issues young people definitely needed some direction on: for example, whether young Muslims have a responsibility to prevent harm in society when they know that older Muslims may plan something." At the time of the AP article, Hussain did acknowl-

⁴⁸ Nasiha Citizenship Foundation (NCF) Website, <http://www.nasiha.co.uk/>. At the time of this writing, the NCF website is still under construction and users are asked to log in to view the curriculum.

edge that some of the examples were a little too explicit and said that “originally we thought it would be best to start looking at these issues a little bit head-on...but we’re dealing with the issues a little more tactfully.”⁴⁹ This new tact appears to include a members-only website, but the thrust of the NCF curriculum appears to be that Islamic teaching in non-NCF affiliated Madrassahs is what drives Islamic extremism among the country’s young British Muslims.

The Nasiha curriculum has received 100,000 pounds in government money as part of a larger program intended to fight extremism in the Muslim community. The plan is laid out in the Department for Communities and Local Government’s report entitled, “Preventing violent extremism—Winning hearts and Minds.” The report identifies the threat of extremism that is both global and local as the most important challenge to Britain’s security for many years to come. The policy sets out a range of measures for improving the country’s security arrangements through four key approaches: “...promoting shared values, supporting local solutions, building civic capacity and leadership, and strengthening the role of faith institutions and leaders.”⁵⁰ The shared and ‘non-negotiable’ values include respect for the rule of law, freedom of speech, equality of opportunity, and respect and responsibility toward others. Brief mention is made of the need to do more to promote equality of opportunity through the improvement of education attainment, higher employment, and investment in deprived areas. Overall, however, the emphasis of the government plan remains firmly fixed on a national priority to tackle violent extremism.

Reiterated throughout “Winning hearts and Minds” is that Muslim radicalization and extremism is driven by a lack of understanding of the teachings of Islam among young British Muslims; the Nasiha project is seen as an answer to this problem. An acknowledgement of how questions relating to British Muslim identity and socioeconomic deprivation are linked and the challenges they present for Muslim youth are ignored. In light of the socioeconomic experience of a pre-

⁴⁹ “Government backed program to teach citizenship lessons in madrassahs,” *The Associated Press*, May 27, 2007.

⁵⁰ “Preventing violent extremism – Winning hearts and minds,” in *Department for Communities and Local Government* (London: Crown Copyright, 2007), 5.

dominantly young British Muslim population outlined above, however, it is especially troubling that these issues are left out of a document that serves as a government tool kit on how to approach its Muslim community.

Conclusion

In a documentary produced by the Nasiha Citizenship Foundation about the project, one of the Imams interviewed talks about the feeling among British Muslim youth of being pulled in two directions. While it is encouraging to know that the pressures encountered by Muslim youth are being recognized by those working within the project, it is still too early to know whether the lessons offered by the NCF will provide young people with a forum to openly explore questions of alienation and identity formation. The larger action plan that frames the Nasiha project with its emphasis on Islamic teaching as the root of radicalism makes it unlikely that other issues of British Muslim socioeconomic disenfranchisement and community marginalization will be addressed in a meaningful way by the British government. What is apparent, however, is that there is a need to advance both the debates around the idea and the application of multiculturalism beyond dichotomous categories of “us” and “them,” and “non-Muslim” and “Muslim.” As a number of commentators on the issue point out, different ethnic groups, both majority and minority, should appreciate the inherent value of multiculturalism and the importance it carries for civil society, but that this cannot be achieved unless there is a significant elimination of ethnic inequalities. In other words, the success of British multiculturalism will be revealed through how it deals with the current predicaments facing British Muslim youth.⁵¹

⁵¹ Abbas, *Ibid.*