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English Muslims and the Debates in Segregation

Jamie Halsall

In the context of segregation, the issues around English Muslims have attracted critical attention from social scientists and policy makers. Past socio-economic indicators demonstrate that English Muslims, particularly those of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin, are the most deprived ethnic minority groups. During the spring and summer of 2001 civil unrest erupted in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley. Hundreds of people were hurt and millions of pounds worth of damage was caused to the local communities. At the time it was a blatant signifier of racism and cultural intolerance in Britain. After the disturbances independent panels were set up to investigate what was the main cause of the problems in particular areas of Oldham, Bradford and Burnley. In each inquiry the findings revealed that communities were living 'Parallel Lives', which was seen to be a failure within communities and of social policy, citing 'Social Segregation' as a contributory factor. More recently in September 2005 Trevor Phillips, chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) gave a stark warning that Britain is 'sleepwalking' into racial segregation, with white, Muslims and black 'ghettos' dividing cities. Currently there is major debate on the issues surrounding ethnic segregation in the British context. There are two current schools of thought, firstly that ethnic minorities are experiencing segregation and secondly, the opposing view, that there is little evidence to suggest that segregation is occurring.

The aim of this paper is to explore the debates around segregation within the context of English Muslims.¹ The paper starts with a historical overview of ethnic minorities, focusing on English Muslims living in England. This leads on to a debate on the factors which influence and result in segregation. The paper then goes on to discuss the socio-economic indicators focusing on education and employment.

English Muslims in a Historical Context

Research on ethnic minorities in Britain is a fairly recent phenomenon. The concept has interested social scientists since the early 1950s. Peach (2005), for example, noted that research into ethnic minorities has mutated from a concern with 'colour' in the 1950s, to 'race' in the 1960s, and to 'ethnicity' in the 1980s and 1990s. Contemporary concerns focus on 'religion' and 'identity'. This shift of focus has been influenced by globalisation within an economic, political, social and cultural context. Held et al (1999, p1) have argued that globalisation 'is rapidly being moulded into a shared social space by economic and technological forces and that developments in one region of the world can have profound consequences for the life chances of individuals or communities on the other side of the globe'. Thus confirming that globalisation in a global context dominates the way people live and see themselves in society.

Over a period of time there have been many different phrases used to describe many ethnic minority groups, for example, 'Asian', 'British Asian' and 'English Muslim'. These descriptions of ethnic minority groups signify how others perceive them. However, individuals within these

ethnic minority groups may not identify themselves in this way. The main crux of identity is seen through the individual and as Woodward (2004, p8) points out identity involves: 'a link between the personal and the social', 'some active engagement by those who take up identities', 'being the same as some people and different from others, as indicated by and representations' and 'a tension between how much control I have in constructing my identities and how much control or constraint is exercised over me'. But overall the leading factor to developing an identity is governed by the way a person grows up and how that person is brought up. Hence, the main element to develop identities is within the historical context.

There have been two main periods of net inflow of migrants into Britain since 1931. The first was in the years 1931 to 1940 when immigration was very low, many emigrants returned and there was considerable net immigration from Ireland and Europe. The second net inflow started in the 1950s, as a result of a large increase in net immigration from Commonwealth countries. Hindells (2000) has noted that there was a sharp increase after the Second World War as there was a serious shortage of young male workers due to the huge losses of active servicemen. In addition the consequences of the historical events of 1947, when the British Empire in India devolved into India and Pakistan, and 1971 when West Pakistan and East Pakistan separated to form Pakistan and Bangladesh were major contributions to emigrant flow to Britain. The partition of India at the end of the British Raj caused the movement of some 17.5 million people across the new borders and thus a rise in migration (Peach, 2006). The British Government therefore actively invited labourers from overseas. According to Sarre et al (1989) the first group to arrive were West Indians, especially from Jamaica. Bangladeshis, Indians and Pakistanis soon followed them in the 1950s and 1960s. The movement of migrants peaked in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Anwar (1979) writes that in this time period there was a tradition of migration established, in sociological terms this is known as a 'social force'. This social force of migrants can be explained in terms of colonial links, political freedom and economic factors. In migration terms it is known as 'push' and 'pull' factors. For example, in the case of Pakistan, there was a lack of work and opportunity in their own country, which therefore brought about the 'push' towards the migration to Britain. The availability of jobs in Britain 'pulled' the migrants to come and work here. Anwar has suggested the main factor of Pakistan emigration to Britain was due to employment. As Anwar writes:

"When job vacancies went up, immigration also went up, and when vacancies went down, immigration went down" (Anwar, 1979, p25).

Anwar's research found that the main reason for migration was economic incentive. Over three-quarters said they came to the Britain 'to get work or to earn money' or 'to have a better future for the children and the family'. Other respondents talked about losing everything due to the partition of Pakistan and Bangladesh thus persuading them to try their luck in Britain where some relatives were already living.

The migrants settled in large numbers in Greater London, where many went into the service industries such as transport. In the West Midlands migrants entered the metal manufacturing industries and in the North West they were employed into textile occupations. In 1973 the British Government estimated that commonwealth immigrants numbered approximately 1.4 million, this was equal to two and half percent of the total population of Britain (HMSO, 1973). The immigrants were recorded by the 1970-74 Government as making an important

contribution to the economy and public services by relieving shortages of labour. The concentration of immigrants in geographical areas, where opportunities for employment were greatest, resulted in 60% settling in London and the West Midlands (HMSO, 1973). With the contribution being valued by the British Government migrants became settled and whilst their children were growing up the 'men and their partners took additional commitments and leaving Britain became less of a concern' (Patel and Platel, 2001, p193).

The South Asians who came to Britain came from particular areas, namely the Punjab, Gujrat and Bengal. Certainly most of the South Asian people came from specific villages within these regions. As a result these villages lost many of their young active males and wives, parents and children were left behind. Hinnells (2000) has noted that those people who came from South Asia expected to stay in Britain for a limited time only, their main aim was to save as much money as they could and send this home to increase family honour. Furthermore, in order to save as much money as possible they were willing to undertake as much overtime as possible, working the unsociable hours of the night shift in the factories. As Anwar points out:

“The immigrants left Pakistan in order to return home with money to buy land and build better houses and to raise their social status. One respondent explained, ‘I came here to work for a few years to earn money, to buy some land in Pakistan and then go back and settle there’ (Anwar, 1979, p21).

The newly immigrant ethnic minorities had to experience white racism. By the late 1950s and early 1960s the white population in Britain became increasingly fearful that ethnic minorities were taking their jobs away from them. Many white people felt that their country would be 'swamped' and the 'purity of island race' was under threat. Race riots and politicians (i.e. Enoch Powell) became 'tough on immigration' thus provoking Government action. From 1962 a sequence of legal measures were introduced which increasingly restricted immigrants to enter Britain. Furthermore, there was additional increased pressure on housing and the social services.

The history of the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities is intimately attached to the histories of the Lancashire and Yorkshire towns on both sides of the Pennines' mill towns. For example Dahya (1974) has calculated that a third of the Pakistani work force in Bradford was employed in the wool textile industry. Both sets of minorities provided cheap labour that allowed the mills to face growing international competition in the textile industry. The jobs taken were almost invariably unskilled. Many of the houses which Bangladeshi and Pakistani immigrants bought or lived in lacked basic amenities such as hot water and bathrooms. The houses, which they occupied, were/are purpose built terraced housing built closely together. Hinnells (2000) has noted that in the 1970s and early 1980s the South Asian population suffered proportionally badly from the recession. With the increasing introduction of technology in textile mills labour disappeared. The cheap labour force in Bangladesh now did the work previously completed by Bangladeshi workers in the north of England.

In 1986 the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee, which investigated Bangladeshi communities in Britain, argued that the root cause of the Bangladeshi minorities could be seen as threefold. Firstly, as most of the Bangladeshi immigrants arrived from a rural peasant society to a British urban society, they found it difficult to adapt. Secondly, their reluctance to accept the English language influenced virtually every aspect of their daily life in a negative way. Fifty percent of Bangladeshi women spoke English 'slightly' or 'not at all'

and amongst men the language barrier percentage was considerably higher than any other ethnic group (Home Affairs Select Committee, 1986, p 12). Thirdly, most Bangladeshis in Britain have experienced discrimination in relation to housing and employment. However, the problems highlighted above still exist today for the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities. As Amin (2002) points out in the last 25 years, large sections of the population of Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities have experienced economic hardship and social deprivation. Statistics have shown that the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities across the Pennines are the most impoverished.

Factors of Segregation

The study of segregation is both controversial and complex. The topic has inspired extremes of views and action, obtaining support as well as ‘condemnation’ and inciting passions which vary from ‘active encouragement’ to resigned acceptance or violent resistance’ (Smith, 1989). Smith has argued that segregation is ‘soaked’ in ‘symbolism’, basking in images that are connected to a ‘benevolent’ colonial segregationism with the terrors of ‘apartheid’ and the demise of the British city. This implies that segregation is not a neutral term. Duncan and Duncan (1955) have argued that segregation is a somewhat fuzzy concept. Segregation is often seen to mark the failure of assimilation and a process that spatially victimizes certain groups. The term ‘segregation’ is always viewed in a ‘bad name’ and when it is directed to people, it is always ‘pejorative’ (Peach, 1996). The concept of segregation refers to two key processes, which are social differentiation and spatial patterns. The main manifestation of segregation can be found in the social, economic and political processes. For example Smith (1993) has argued that the origin of segregation can be traced to the economics of labour migration and the politics of social policy (i.e. housing). There are five aspects of segregation: (1) ‘the measurement of segregation; (2) the function of segregation, (3) stability and change; (4) inner-city comparison and (5) the policy implications in the wider context’ (Boal, 2001, p2).

Smith (1989) has noted that segregation in the broadest sense relates to the fabric of all social life. Primarily segregation is the spatial separation of various social groups across different places. At present segregation is understood to be a mark of failure of ‘assimilation’ and a process that spatially victimises certain minority groups. Kaplan and Woodhouse (2004) have noted that eliminating segregation is a normative target in many societies that experience segregation and are striving to end the division of their urban areas. Research over the past has focused on uncovering how segregation develops and how it may be mitigated.

Segregation involves a group in a context. There are currently two diverse areas of focus on research into segregation. Some studies examining segregation found that it existed in particular geographic areas (see Connerly, 2005; Robson 1986; Phillips, 1981; Boal, 1975), whilst other studies examined the implications of ‘ghettoisation’ in neighbourhood areas (see Wilson 1993; Hirsch 1985; Philpott, 1978). But inevitably:

“Most research focuses on one group/context dyad but some studies are more comparative. Groups vary considerably, not only in their cultural make up but also in the financial, human, and other resources they possess. Context generally refers to a place and accordingly accounts for a wide variety of factors relating to history, culture, economic opportunity, and political state” (Kaplan and

Woodhouse, 2004, p579).

Interestingly, Peach (1981, pp20-21) has four different hypotheses on segregation. He suggests that: (1) 'the ethnic minority population is segregated because it is confined to one area and absent from the rest; (2) the ethnic population is unsegregated because white people are living in all areas where ethnic minorities are found, while the white population is highly segregated because the majority live in exclusive white areas; (3) the centre of the city is segregated because ethnic minorities live there and (4) the centre of the city is unsegregated because the population is mixed'.

The origin of segregation can be traced back to Booth's Study of London in 1880s (Savage et al, 2003). Traditionally the theory of segregation developed from the Chicago School of Urban Sociology. In the 1920s they had a number of scholars who published widely on the subject such as Ernest Burgess, Louis Wirth, Homer Hoyt and Robert Park. These scholars were interested in systematising a general model of segregation in the modern city. For example, the Burgess Model acknowledged a number of typical zones that tended to radiate from the centre of the city. These zones included the central business district in the middle, surrounded by a zone of transition, which light industry and commerce occupied and sadly where the most marginalized people were forced to live. According to Savage et al (2003) this area, the zone of transition, contained 'ghettos' and what Burgess described as a 'black band'. This is where mainly newly arrived immigrants lived. Ward (1971) has noted that property within this area becomes neglected, thus causing a departure of the most prosperous members of the resident population. With this rapid neglect of the physical quality of the dwellings social disorganisation takes place, as Burgess points out:

"...with their submerged region of poverty, degradation and disease, and their underworlds of crime...The slums are also crowded to over-flowing with immigrant colonies - the ghetto, Little Scilly, and American adaptations. Wedging out from here is the black belt, with its free and disorderly life. The area of deterioration, while essentially one of decay, of stationary or declining population, is also one of regeneration, as witness the mission, the settlement, the artist colony, radical centres - all obsessed with the vision of a new and better world" (Burgess, 2002, p247).

Smith (1989) offers a useful description about segregation within the context of the social science discipline. The first is the empirical tradition of 'social geography' or as it is known to social scientists 'spatial sociology'. This idea has been borrowed from the Chicago School of Urban Sociology. Fundamentally, it is believed that the relationship between social and physical distance in segregation provides a measurement of the frequency or quality of social mixing. According to Smith the practical aim is to:

"...explore the possibility that 'ones' behaviour and attitudes towards members of a disliked social category will become more positive after direct interpersonal interaction with them" (Smith, 1989, p14).

This idea has focused researchers on the issues concerning the intensity and the patterning of segregation. Smith has noted the bulk of the literature has provided empirical answers to essentially empirical debates around configuration of residential differentiation.

Moreover, she goes on to argue that this type of literature is ‘bound up’ with the duty of ‘developing’, ‘contesting’ and ‘refining’ a range of measuring tools. This approach is invaluable when examining the empirical facts about segregation within the context of policy making. However, one of the problems with this method is that segregation is totally entangled or as Smith argues is ‘an end in itself’. Smith has stressed that there is an unwillingness to consider that segregation has meaning, in the economic, social and political sense. Thus as a consequence attention has shifted to the absolute magnitude or the degree of segregation than the social significance within specific (national) political economies.

The second approach implies that segregation is ‘conceptualised’ within the context of social, economic and political life. This perspective links class relationships and social differentiations, which in turn recognise that segregation, is a ‘neglected facet’ of the reproduction of social relations (Harvey 1985 in Smith 1989). Both these approaches have shed light on segregation. Smith (1989) has pointed out that the historical time frame is fundamental when researching segregation. The historical perspective demonstrates that segregation is not a ‘dying’ concept but a modern concept in political and public life. In other words segregation:

“...is resilient because it captures much more than mere physical separation and it expresses much more than the differential distribution of material rewards. It encapsulates, rather, ‘an interlocking system of economic institutions, social practices and customs, political power, law and ideology’ (Cell, 1982, p14)...” (Smith, 1989, p17).

This focus on the historical aspect of segregation is also confirmed by the later research of Hamnett (2001). He notes that during the 1930s debates around social segregation started to take place in Britain, whilst in the US this started in the late nineteenth century. Interest in segregation in urban areas waned during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s as the focus of sociological interest became centered on the expanding suburbs. The American urban riots of the mid 1960s and the public debate surrounding race and ethnic transformation of many urban areas reawakened concerns regarding class and segregation. This brought about expansive research, which led to the release of several publications throughout the 1960s and 1970s on ethnic segregation in Britain, the US and elsewhere (see Van Valley et al). Since the 1950s there has been much discussion on how segregation is measured within the realms of quantitative research. By the 1980s issues surrounding segregation had become defined into two themes, the first of these concerned with the existence of the under class and its structural and behavioural causes. The second theme concerned with social polarization and the accompanying issue of urban duality. Both of these themes are tied with race, ethnicity and segregation.

Socio-Economic Indicators

As discussed above since the 1960s successive research has revealed a pattern of continuing disadvantage amongst ethnic minority groups. In these groups segregation is common in most cities and socio-economic characteristics are the common thread to identity in the host community. The host community would experience some degree of socio-economic segregation. Lee (1977) has argued that segregation should not be solely based upon ethnic or racial characteristics, but must take into consideration social and economic factors, which will

explain the spatial segregation. Furthermore, Lee has pointed out that there has been relatively little comment on segregation within terms of isolating socio-economic influences. These socio-economic factors are employment, education, health and housing.

Education

Over the last couple of years there have been numerous press reports and academic research focusing on segregation in schools. Much research has focused primarily on income segregation and the introduction of the education 'quasi-market' (Burgess et al, 2005). Modood (2005, p83) has suggested that ethnic minority groups are proportionally less qualified than whites. He suggests in broad terms that the ethnic minority population can be divided into two groups when examining education: (1) Caribbeans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis; and (2) Whites, Indians, African Asians, Chinese and Africans. The relationship between these two groups is clear because group 2 are more likely to obtain better qualifications than group 1. In the case of group 1 there was a high proportion, between 60% to 70%, without GCSE or equivalent qualifications. Whilst in group 2 it was 45-50%. The findings by Modood (2005) are also confirmed by Peach (2006, p143) who concluded that South Asian Muslims have the lowest education qualifications of all ethnic minority groups. 37% of Muslims have no educational qualifications compared with 29% of Sikhs, 26% of Christians and 20% of Hindus.

According to Anwar (2005) the education achievement levels of British Asians i.e. Bangladeshi and Pakistani are generally lower than that of white and some other ethnic groups. This is borne out by the statistics of 2002 GCSE results, which revealed that the percentage of British Asian GCSE candidates achieving five or more A* - C Grades was proportionately lower than that of other candidates (White, Chinese and Indian). Anwar has argued that the 2002 statistics demonstrate a significant gap between British Asians and other ethnic minorities students. Furthermore Anwar's (2002) research has revealed some worrying issues around education, showing that Muslim children are falling behind. With all the respondents he interviewed there were no positive comments. Half of the respondents referred to the failure of the British education system to meet the needs of Muslim pupils. For example in the mainstream schools there was a lack of facilities for Muslim pupils, such as halal food, praying facilities and traditions. More serious than this, there is a dire shortage of Muslim teachers and governors, furthering the lack of understanding of Muslim Culture within the education system. British Asian children have discussed that bullying and attacks are common, they also refer to the bias in religious education and of a complete misrepresentation of Islam. This illustrates the urgent need to redress the approach to education in schools. The next socio-economic factor to be examined is employment and how opportunity and choice are linked to education.

Employment

Employment is an important aspect of ethnic minorities because it offers an explanation into their social make up. The labour market position and the employment status of ethnic minorities are a central factor when understanding the segregation issue. As Mason (2003, p69) has argued 'the resources that are derived from employment are keys to accessing a range of other desired goals and services'. In addition Mason has pointed out that in the past there have been a variety of explanations concerning ethnic minorities in the labour market.

The most widespread agreement is the nature of job seekers. This situation relies a great deal upon 'assimilationist assumptions that are widely encountered in explanations of migration labour'. Mason goes on to state that migration is 'associated with disadvantage with recent migrants experiencing greater labour market exclusion than those longer settled, or the second and third generations' (Mason, 2003, p69). Since the 1960s, there has been much research undertaken into employment, within the context of ethnic minorities. According to Mason, from the 1960s to the present day research has revealed a continuing disadvantage from ethnic minorities in the employment sector. On the whole ethnic minorities are over represented in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs. Further to this, Mason has noted that there has been a persistent pattern of exclusion altogether in the labour market, resulting in ethnic minorities experiencing lower participation rates and higher rates of unemployment in comparison to their white counterparts.

As stated earlier the first British Asians were granted access to employment opportunities, however these were limited, a large percentage were absorbed into the industrial sector i.e. textile mills. Historically the textile industry, in places like Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, was the common thread binding the community together. Moreover, the textile industry provided people with work in a global industry. The need for workers in the industrial sector was due to the move away from this type of work by white male workers, due to the poor working conditions, hours and lack of promotion prospects. Location of the mills was an important factor because it provided cheap housing. Most British Asians were treated poorly and the conditions were unpleasant, to quote:

“...I got my first job as a jobber, for £2.16s a week. My English wasn't good, but it was enough for the employers. They didn't want to know about your problem, they just wanted to show you how to work...The pay wasn't enough and there was nothing to achieve” (Race Today, 1983, p32).

However, over the last 20 years the amount of British Asians working in the textile industry has been halved (Anwar, 2005). The 1960s saw the mills invest in new technologies, which were operated 24 hours a day to maximise profits. As the machinery developed there was less demand for workers resulting in a huge impact on the community. Kundnani (2001) has argued that these communities were left on the 'scrap heap' and by the end of the twentieth century British Asians had lived with soaring rates of unemployment. There were major economic changes in the 1980s due to the decline in the manufacturing industry, but there was however, employment growth in the service sector. In some respect the growth in the service sector (distribution, hotels, catering and repairs) did help ethnic minority employment. The Labour Forces Surveys of 1988, 1989 and 1990 showed that a large proportion of all ethnic minority groups were employed in service sector jobs. Those of Chinese and Bangladeshi origin were more likely to work in hotels and the catering industry, whereas most Pakistani and Bangladeshi men preferred to work in the textile and footwear sector (Mason, 2003).

Conclusion

This paper has explored issues surrounding segregation, with reference to English Muslims. An insight on the historical element of English Muslims has been provided. At the centre of this it is suggested that globalisation has moulded the identity of English Muslims. It can therefore be concluded that it is impossible to classify certain sections of ethnic minority groups as they have

their own identities. This research has revealed that the issue of identity with ethnic minority groups living in Britain is a sensitive and emotive issue and one which is complex, requiring further research. A clear, informative and constructive discussion on current theoretical debate with reference to English Muslims has been provided. It has been found that there is no clear academic agreement on the issues surrounding segregation and thus it could be said to be in a state of flux leaving the debate open for further inquiry. However, issues discussed in this paper have shown that historical and political events are signifiers on the causes of segregation.

Note

¹ All the source material, which this paper has drawn from, uses the terms ‘Asian’, ‘Ethnic Minorities’, ‘Ethnic Minority Groups’ and ‘South Asian Muslims’. This paper will use the term ‘British Asian’ in the context of ‘English Muslim’.

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