Leicester Muslims: citizenship, race and civil religion

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‘It does not matter what I say I am: I am European and I am British. But it does matter how you see me. If you do not see me as a European, if you do not see me as a Brit, it does not matter what I say. Whatever I will say, I will be a Muslim.’
(interview, 26.07.2011)

In the 1970s newspaper advertisements advised migrants to go elsewhere as the city was already ‘full to the brim’, after the acceptance of more than 14,000 Asian Indian refugees, more than half of the total number of people expelled from Uganda by Idi Amin: “In your own interests and those of your family you should accept the advice of the Uganda Settlement Board and not come to Leicester, I think they said.”(interview, 26.07.2011). Leicester was overwhelmed by its increased population and was desperately hoping to stop more massive migration. However, by 1981 the migrant population had risen to 59,709 and by 2001 to 100,000 (Open Society Institute, 2010: 32). By 2012 it is estimated that Leicester will become the first city in Britain to have a white minority
(interview, 23.07.2011)

Leicester, a medium-sized city in the East Midlands is indeed on the way to becoming one of first British cities where former migrants will be a larger group than the native population. From 46,1% in the 2001 (Census, 2001) the non-white population was
estimated to rise to 51% by 2011 (ONS, 2009) or to 55.6% by 2025 (Danielis, 2007). As much of the ethnic minority population is Asian or Asian British, many ‘double migrants’ from African colonies, Leicester is a good example of a city where migration and the colonial past encounter discussions of ethnicity and race. Further, the largest and upcoming religious communities are Muslims counted to 11.3% in 2001, expected to equal the number of Hindus, counted to 14.74% in 2001 by 2013. Because Leicester has essentially been one of the British cities of migration, populated by citizens with different ethnic origins, it is a place where diversity and a multitude of cultures is a given of everyday reality. Further, the local government of Leicester is proud of the multiculturalism of the city and believes its policies enhance plurality and the expression of difference. For all these reasons, it is a good place to see how Muslimness is defined at the intersection of citizenship and secularity regimes.

In the following part I will discuss how different uses of the concept of citizenship are and have been shaped by Britain as a state and as a nation, continuing the idea of the British Empire. Reconstructing historical changes within the idea of the state, nation and the people I will point out how Britain has dealt in different time periods with inner and outer diversity, issues relating to the territory of immigration and integration. In doing so, I will explain the main dimensions of the social and political imaginary in which religious migrants need to negotiate their place as reflected by policy documents on the national and local level. Further, expanding configurations of religion and multiculturalism in relation to ideas of race and ethnicity will be developed using the formation of Muslim collective identity and grassroots movements as interpretative collective action. In the second part of this piece I will rely on ethnographic date collected in Leicester during the
spring and summer of the year 2012 to point how imaginaries of citizenship and secularity are mobilised and reinterpreted by local Muslim communities to their own advantage. In this, discourses of race and plurality are employed in creating space for religious collective identities, which have a specific local, national and transnational dynamic.

The British challenge after the last days of the empire was the management of its diversity and the finding of the right structure for the island state. These challenges were shaped by the need of immigration control in order to keep at bay the populations subject to the Queen but not part of the nation and simultaneously managing internal diversity. A solution that was both conceptually rich and practical in nature was to be found in the concept of citizenship, linked to the idea of the nation imagined as a community.

Politically, citizenship and community have been historical points of struggle in British history, framed by a larger context of multiculturalism and its diverse positions: conservative, liberal, pluralist, commercial, corporate (Hall, 2000: 210). This is further complicated by different positions as far as the relationship of culture to race, ethnicity and religion is concerned. In recent years, a concern with security has tightened the debate and a movement from a discourse of ‘race to religion’ can be observed (Allen, 2005).

Although never quite disappearing, religion has in the last decade made a visible comeback both in the civil and in the political sphere in Britain, mostly through the attention given to Muslims and the active self-identification of different groups with the same label. The Rushdie affair caused an awareness of Muslims as a religious group which ‘(re)discovered a new community solidarity’ (Modood, 2005: 157). This collective
force was effective as it could rest on the struggle for social and political recognition (Werbner, 2002) and a consciousness of difference stemming from ‘political blackness’.

If we consider the role and relevance of religion in present Britain we need to think about the way the concept of citizenship has historically allowed different forms of identification, while regulating the way the community/communities were made relevant at different junctures. A context of narratives about Britishness joined by a historical vision on different citizenship regimes further needs to be considered in relation to external and internal diversity, through attention towards discourses and practices of immigration and integration.

**Migration and British citizenship**

British citizenship has made a long journey from a contractual concept emphasising rights and duties to a ‘deal’ for active citizenship. As citizenship both tells us more about the balance between the interior and exterior of the state and of the nation, and at the same time it informs us about the boundaries across which the state and the nation cease to exist, in the following we will pursue changes in the concept of citizenship in relation both to migration and internal population management. In the case of Britain, collective migration history starts at the point where the legacy of the empire wanes and is connected with the British idea of the island as the nation.

The Alien Act of 1905 was innovative through its attempt to regulate immigration control upon entry in the state territory (Wray, 2006). The category of ‘undesirable migrant’ became salient from this moment onwards. Besides the terminology and categories on which the act is based, the most important effect of the act is the dichotomy
between different population segments based on territorial belonging which has been inherited by the modern immigration control systems. So were also its inconsistencies and weaknesses, which stem from a contradiction in the forces that need to be managed by both immigration control and governments. Among these diverging forces should be mentioned the ‘electoral desire for effective immigration control, the economic and other benefits of immigration, and the necessity of maintaining a public commitment to humanitarian principles’ (Wray, 2006: 303 ). The idea of a nation and of a community of people depends on the political climate and assessed gain from the immigration process, both balanced by a broad, ideological concept of moral, shared human values.

The beginnings of the British approach towards immigration control should be seen as managing the unexpected consequences of the empire. In the 1950s Britain considered itself too small to accommodate its population, pouring onto the island from the various parts of the extensive territory that the British Empire had been. The result was increased immigration control and a shift in general attitudes towards race and colour (Freeman, 1995). This was a response towards the equal legal, social and political rights of all citizens, understood as subjects of the Crown. The Marshallian take on citizenship will reformulate this royal allegiance and instead construct a pragmatic concept of citizenship, based on a need for addressing social imbalances. Marshall envisaged citizenship as a way of ensuring equality towards entitlements and as the protection of the individuals from the vicissitudes of the labor market. As such it had little to do with duties and obligations, and it was little troubled by the distinction between public and private beyond the economic and social realm. It envisaged citizens as passive receptors of benefits needing equal chances, and thought of these benefits as formal rights rather
than substantive benefits. The benefits were not conceived as an automatic guarantee of entitlement on the basis of citizenship, rather depended on three domains: work, war and reproduction. However, nationality continue to be understood in terms of monarchical allegiance, combined with a *jus soli* indifferent to race or religion (Everson, 2010).

From 1962 onwards, through the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, differentiation between migrants was first introduced, in 1962 in terms of employment and skills, but from 1968 in terms of race (Murji and Solomos, 2005). The postwar period already combined race relations, the interior management of populations of different provenance with migration control. The rationale was that by reducing diversity and restraining further migration, the integration of those already within the territory would become easier (Solomos, 2003: 81). These shifts need to be seen in the light of Britain managing its internal diversity through reducing the number of new migrants while constructing a collective identification, a generic Britishness for the people already on the island, managed through the concept of race.

The period between 1960 and 1980 can be seen as one of rising social and political tension in regard to post-colonial migration. From 1973 onwards, limiting migration from beyond the European economic zone reinforced concerns with colour and race. It is important to note that Britain imposed immigration control a decade earlier than other European countries, which waited for the economic trouble of the early 1970s (Geddes, 2005).

British citizenship has been an almost inexistent concept until the 1981, when the British Nationality Act (BNA) made a distinction between the native population and the postcolonial migration from the Commonwealth territories. The political and civic
reaction to the British Nationality Act took the debate in two different directions, one
towards the problem of immigration control, defining the nation in ethnic terms, while
renouncing the civic basis of citizenship. Second, simultaneously, citizenship was
understood as the prism through which Commonwealth citizens were assigned a status
with full civil and political rights but no social rights. Built on the rationale of individual
need, the British welfare state sought to take care of the rights of its citizens by selecting
at entry and stratifying the population through different access to resources. While
recognising racial difference, the principle of British citizenship maintains the tension
between universal citizenship and (racial) group particularism. During the Labour ‘equal
opportunity policy’ aiming at affirmative action, (racial) group particularism became a
widespread assumption.

The year 1981 was a turning point for British citizenship, as it created ‘aliens’
both within and beyond the territory of the UK. As revocations of rights are characteristic
of state building periods, we may consider 1981 the period from when we can talk of
Britain as a state (Blitz, 2006). The British Nationality Act broke up with the Marshallian
liberal tradition based on an equilibrium of rights and duties with a focus on social justice
and made individuals responsible to earn the protection and care of the state (Tyler, 2010: 71).
Beyond this dynamic was the felt need to reinforce the British nation-state, through
the including/excluding role of a layered citizenship. Hansen understands the changes
initiated by the BNA as a process of clarification and rationalisation (2000). I would
emphasise that this classification both defined the territory and decided the relations of
equality and sovereignty. Persons with the right of abode were granted British
citizenship, defined through its legal dimension. As such, British citizenship needs to be
considered as a mechanism operating along migration and border control and integration and race management. This also implies that it is articulated along axes of neoliberal governing and multiculturalist legacies of management of diversity and plurality.

This double move has to be understood in the context of the intense and profound institutional reorganisation initiated by the Thatcher government, which implied the revocation of rights connected to citizenship and residence, and a turn towards a managerial state. The managerial turn in state administration meant the parallel bureaucratisation and professionalisation of the state, with an increased privatisation, competition and restructuring and a shift of responsibilities from the public to the private (Clarke and Newman, 1997). It had further implications on the labour market through the processes of privatisation and outsourcing, which were at the basis of many social and economic experiments (Wills, 2010). This has implications on the tightening effect of the combined rhetoric on individual responsibility and the necessity to earn rights and the continued shrinkage of the welfare state, which further created divisions between the populations. The ‘post-imperial class struggle over the resources of a diminished empire was underway’ (Tyler, 2010: 64), combined ethnic and racial hierarchies and superimposed them on existing class divisions.

But we may wonder how the nation was conceptualised in Britain during this time. By early 1980 citizenship in Britain distanced itself from the welfare state with its dynamics of social rights and class equality and was replaced with nationality, immigration and security. The shift towards a neoliberal nation state, cherished by the conservative Thatcher government created several categories of nationality and citizenship and created ethnic and racial boundaries between white and coloured
populations (Baucom, 1999). The boundaries gained validity not in the area of immigration but between fellow citizens, provoking waves of anger and unrest in cities with significant ‘coloured’ populations.

A multiculturalist discourse emerged aiming to include through state support and non-differential treatment both Commonwealth and British-born populations of migrant origin. Support was needed in order to remove ‘distinctive barriers in their exercise of citizenship’ (Meer and Modood, 2009: 479). Multiculturalism accepted and recognised difference starting from the premise of independent cultures and cultural relativism influenced by British social anthropology (Heyck, 1997).

Inequality as social exclusion became from 1997 onwards due to Labour a key policy focus addressed by the Social Exclusion Unit. In this period, a distinction was made between exclusion experienced at the general level of the society or ‘wide’ exclusion and ‘deep’ exclusion, which is experienced by a specific group of people, mostly minorities (Finn, 2008). Policy responses to wide exclusion included from the mid-1990s onwards education, health, employment and access to information, resources and transport, while deep exclusion encountered policy responses which were more targeted and intensive. Towards the end of the 1990s and in the following decade, combating deep exclusion through targeting groups ‘severely excluded’ and ‘at risk’ was the preferred strategy of the British government. The larger context in which this shift of policies was taking place was the need to ensure citizenship participation through equality between individual citizens.

As the terms of the immigration policies have shifted, the national debate on multiculturalism has also been reconfigured, with New Labour as the main actor (Worley
The link between national identity, democracy and immigration control, with a new emphasis on the concept of citizenship, had a direct effect on the way multiculturalism was perceived: the multiculturalist frames have been shifting, due to an increasing concern with immigration and national security towards community cohesion and the importance of shared values, such as active citizenship (Rogers 2007). The ‘community agenda’, based on its identification of communities which led ‘separate lives’, not adhering to the community of the ‘people’ neither in thought nor in deed was a challenge to the philosophy of multiculturalism. Integration and hierarchical evaluation of ethnic, racial and cultural groups transformed the policy agenda, with repercussions in the political and civic articulation of multicultural ideas. Further, integration has been interpreted as a duty to be imposed on migrants through naturalisation, with an emphasis on language, knowledge about the UK and allegiance to the Queen.

The early years of the 21st century further took migration and citizenship policies in the direction of responsibilisation, both on the individual and a collective level. As I have been pointing out before, both individual migrants and their communities have been seen from the 1990s onwards in terms of aliens and failed populations. However, from 2000 onwards we notice a shift from a preoccupation for living with and accommodating diversity to concerns for national security, with ‘failed citizens and outsiders’ seen as a threat to national identity. The moral opposition between good and failed citizens creates the collective body the British community which aims at cohesion, though ensuring its own security, expelling the problematic, ‘failed’ citizens. I agree with Tyler’s argument that the failure of the ‘failed’ is contained by the dimensions of British citizenship, through a dialectical moral opposition between different categories of citizens (2010).
Further, the oppositions articulated by the different layers of citizenship follow closely distinctions already present in British society: existing frames of difference between population groups defined in terms of race, ethnicity and later religion.

The ‘failed populations’ frames have been followed by the logic of ‘dangerous populations’, provoked by the riots around the Rushdie affair (1990) and the Bradford incidents (2005), which reinforced the perception of a conglomerate of social problems which could be associated with migrants and minorities in terms of race and religion related to problems of national identity, belonging and integration. Further, after 2001, global events culminating in the London bombings of 7 July 2005 have caused a vitriolic inflammation of the causal connection between failed multiculturalism and bad citizens, highlighted as problems with certain groups of the population radicalised by religion. These global incidents confirmed the fear of the failure of the multicultural model and echoed the changes taking place in other Western European countries. After 2001, in most of Europe we can observe a strict convergence of immigration and integration regulation (Joppke and Morawska, 2003) and a change in attitude towards Muslims. The policy and political discourses shifted from a focus on the unification of the nation through citizenship integration and the maintenance of boundaries through immigration control towards an agenda of security concerns.

Citizenship plays a central role within the security discourse as it allows for certain population groups to be the legitimate target of security policies, drawing on the moral distinction between appropriate and inappropriate citizens. The consequence of securitisation is the criminalisation of segments of the population and the reinforcement of labels reproducing social and political stereotypes. The population of the nation-state
is broken up in different groups labeled either as successful, as precarious or as failed (Tyler, 2010). Whichever the label might be, the individuals are tightly connected to the nation-state which constructs the label, through the inclusion/exclusion mechanism on which they depend. Butler and Spivak understand this mechanism as a proof of the impossibility to evade the nation-state (2007:17). Moreover, in spite of this process of splintering through top-down moral judgment, the appeal is made for a united community of citizens, based on a shared, self-defined morality. The nation needs a community having a strong connection and commitment to Britain, based on ‘a range of proposals that touch every stage of an individual's life’ and a common bond: citizenship (Goldsmith 2008, cited in Tyler, 2010). Communities based on ethnicity, race and/or religion are considered proactive and voluntary forms of segregation from the national community.

Further, the multicultural model of community of communities is questioned and policed. However, in order to understand the impact of the changes in the understanding of the content and role of citizenship we need to consider historically the way diversity and plurality has been dealt with in Britain.

**Race, plurality and multiculturalism**

Colour and race are both at the basis of the framing of British immigration and integration policies. As a matter of fact, integration in the British context is seen as a way of improving relations between different population groups called communities, which are distinguished on the basis of race or colour (Favell, 1998; Joppke, 1999). Shifting in time from a multiculturalist discourse emphasising the equality between communities and cultures, to allegiance and subordination to the idea of one national community, Britain
shown signs of convergence with current integration policies of other Western European countries (Joppke 1999). However, as I will point out, distinctions made upon race and culture remain important both for a definition of the national community in which the different communities need to dissolve as a form of self-identification and mobilisation for equality-based rights for groups within the national community.

Distinctions based on race and the early management of plurality have been an American export, taking place in the 1960s. The role of home secretary Roy Jenkins, the influence of the Harvard Law School and the ‘race relations’ as studied by the Chicago School need to be mentioned here (Bleich, 2011: 61-2). According to the American model, differences in skin color and implicitly cultures determine social conflict and problems, which can to be solved by civil law centred on the issue of discrimination (not criminal law). This ‘colour racism’ (Gilroy, 1987) continues to be influential to this day, especially through the predominance of racial dualism in both legal and policy frameworks (Alexander, 2002). The first Race Relations Acts from 1965 and 1968 were designed to ensure equality, helping migrants through providing welfare, while white communities were educated about the migrants. The idea was to stop discrimination between population groups and promote equality through equal chances (Solomos, 2003).

A shift in thinking about race took place between 1968 and 1976 when the notion that policy in a plural society should not be colour blind gained terrain: racial prejudices were to be punished and affirmative action was to be introduced. This involved a change from thinking in terms of race relations to giving attention to acts of racism. Race consciousness became coupled with the issues of discrimination, in the 1970s linking the topic of race with that of gender (Sooben, 1990; Bleich, 2011: 65). Group specific policy
targets were introduced as a much-welcomed alternative to formal legal equality. Positive discrimination gained ground and race-conscious policies were given priority.

The 1990s saw the possibility of extension of race policies to Muslims. Collective claims were already voiced around the Rushdie affair: Muslims as a group need to be included under diversity categories. Through the Rushdie affair, Muslimness became a salient collective identity, which was increasingly being pushed forward both from the grassroots and from academia (Modood, 1990; Asad, 1990). The possibility for deeply ingrained patterns of exclusion, both discursive and institutional (related to a police incident where police discriminated based on skin colour) pointed to a need to shift away from the multicultural rhetoric.

Muslims were firmly set apart, separated from other minority ethnic and faith communities (Ahmad and Evergeti, 2010). The concept of islamophobia was used to describe a new form of racism, directed specifically against the Muslim population (Modood, 1992). Formal rights were insufficient as inequality was strongly present in society, Muslims argued (interview 24.07.2011). Further Muslims felt the need to unite under a category that would encounter less discrimination than those based on race and ethnicity. Modood argued that discrimination is a sword with two edges, one making distinctions based on race, the other dividing based on culture (1992).

Until 2003, however, the courts did not accept Muslims as a group, although other religious groups such as Jews and Sikhs have been previously recognised. Discrimination of Muslims as Muslims was not punishable under the law up to that moment. Muslims could only apply for discrimination measures through indirect protection, as a member of an ethnic group, such as Pakistani, Arab, etc. This caused resentment and enhanced
Muslim activism (Modood, 2006). Along the recognition of the group as such, collective identification became stronger, with the claim that difference was a right that needed to be accommodated by the government. Muslim assertiveness claimed recognition and argued that race relations are ineffective tools for accommodating religion.

Already beginning around the Rushdie affair, Muslims have been recognised as a religious group by civil society groups. The organisations that moderated between the government and Muslim representatives were in particular Anglican churches and not racially different groups (Modood, 2006: 42). Public social recognition further shaped Muslims as a religious group, with religious claims in a specifically secular state, which discriminated on the basis of collective religion. However, Muslim voices at that moment were mixed, while claims were made in the name of Islam and argued around issues of blasphemy, some wanted recognition as a collective group in the name of religion in order to transgress ethnic and racial groups. A similar ambiguity can be found in the example of the Muslim Council of Britain formed in 1997 as a direct consequence of the Rushdie Affair, which had difficulties addressing with a unanimous voice both the government and the Muslim communities (McLoughlin 2005).

Muslimness was from the Rushdie affair on and remained a claim of accommodation for religion as religion, backed up by a community that wished to transcend other policy categories (interview, 26.01.2011). It is important to recognise that this concept of collective identity contrasts both the secular basis of the nation-state and the universalistic concepts of justice and resource management inherent in liberal citizenship. But it is just as important to recognise that the new collective identity formed through religion transgressed community and kin (for example biraderi networks)
allegiances, and connected Muslims through adherence to Islam to the *ummah*. This new identification would prove especially salient in the British Muslim position regarding international conflicts, such as the positions towards the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

A sharp change in race relations can be further observed in the light of the security concerns which informed immigration and integration policies in the past decade. As a consequence of the ‘race-riots’ in cities with significant Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations, the British social problems have already been in the 1990s increasingly packed in superimposed layers of different frames which equated violence with lack of integration, spatial segregation with separation and hate, while race, ethnicity and religion were often equated to each other. Moreover, as a consequence of 9/11 this easily translated into a global and national problem with Muslims, a claim which was met and contested by an increasingly aware and organised, but heterogeneous Muslim community.

**Leicester Muslims – ‘a pragmatic community’**

In this part I will point out the specific instances that have been growing out of grassroots initiatives in the city of Leicester. Besides the processes of collective identification, which have been triggered by national and local discourses and implementations of policies concerning race and citizenship, there are also efforts of embodiment taking place at the local level. For this I will follow closely the logic of the Prevent agenda (Home Office, 2007) and the Community Cohesion policies (Leicester City Council 2009) pointing out specific interpretations of citizenship, race, religion and plurality affect the way Muslim groups organise and define themselves.
The Prevent agenda and the programmes focusing on community cohesion have been important for the Muslim community in Leicester. They singled out the Muslim community and focused on those Muslim groups considered moderate. The effect has been a competition between Muslim groups within the city for the limited resources provided under Prevent, and an uneasy feeling in regard to other faith communities which did not receive financial help (interview, 21.07. 2011). Furthermore, Prevent came attached with the stigma of the special needs of the populations is was designed for, and the attention given to preventing terrorism. Muslims participating in one way or the other in Prevent needed to situate themselves actively in relation to issues of national security and the perceived Islamic danger, radicalisation.

The communitarian approach also caused difficulties for Muslims, though in a different manner than those caused by the Prevent agenda. This approach presented opportunities for engagement and funding but ‘it is about religion or culture, but not about class and economy related problems’ (interview, 23.07.2011). As such it encouraged the claims of Muslims as a group, especially as a religious group, but it was not concerned with social class problems. Content with a cultural explanation for existing social inequalities, the community agenda did not go deep into tackling fundamental inequalities between different population segments.

The focus on culture and religion remained present during the Prevent policies. High profile community leaders and especially religious leaders are often exposed to the actions informed by general security concerns. Being singled out for general security concerns is unpleasant: ‘It is not easy to be on a plane and to be the only one singled out for special control out of 200 people. And that only because I have a beard and I look
different.’ (interview, 26.07.2011). These feelings are part of a more general perception that Muslims always have to defend themselves in the face of different forms of accusations, they need to react and respond to multiple social challenges: as a Muslim ‘you have to prove all the time your intentions, your loyalty’, a painful and exhausting experience both in the short and in the long run (interview, 23.07.2011).

However uncomfortable this focus on Muslims, it can also be seen and experienced in positive terms. Prevent also ‘presents an opportunity, as the community receives funding, but also an entry point on cohesion and safety which can then be used to keep in touch with the municipality’ (interview, 23.07.2011). Community leaders are aware of the advantages and disadvantages that policy attention brings with itself. Besides being aware, they are skillfully negotiating and employing the possibilities they have, using them as opportunities. The securitisation of religion repeatedly invites Muslims as a religious group to defend itself in the public scene and thus offers a possibility for visibility and audibility. Further, although policies come attached with certain forms of social stigma, they do provide access to resources, even if not to all parts of the Muslim communities.

The interaction between Muslims and the local government has initiated a double process of change and accommodation, which can be seen in the context of the hope the two-sided process of integration Muslims expected. While Islam itself is not changing, the way it is understood and the way Muslims behave does (interview, 24.07.2011). This often means a creative process of interpretation and adjustment, triggered by the ‘need to accommodate to the British society and this means that there are things which need to be understood in a different way than they were when the Qur’an was written’ (interview,
23.07.2011). However, this creative and accommodated position makes Muslims fragile as they can be criticised from two different positions: first, from the point of view of the state which believes that Muslims could and should give up more of their identity and second, from the side of radical and traditionalist schools of thought, which say that European Muslims cannot be considered Muslims anymore, as they pervert the teachings (interview, 24.07.2011). For British Muslims this often implies a fear of not belonging, of not being accepted in the society and a continuous doubt about the ‘right way’ (interview, 23.07.2011).

For some British Muslims the dilemma of accommodation involves the continuous need to be reflexive and assertive, a strong need for being responsive to society and it calls for a certain position of the believer in relation to the object of faith (interview, 23.07.2011). As such the contours and social relevance of Islam are changing. But can these changes be understood as a shift in religion under the pressure of regimes of secularity, or should they be seen as an organic process inherent in the nature of religion, as some Muslim practitioners suggest (interview, 21.07.2011) (also see Taylor 2007).

The process of adjustment is often about things that may seem insignificant. When elaborating on this point, one of my respondents talked about cultural rather than religious accommodation when explaining the adjustments needed for a dinner: in the seating arrangements neither a women dressed in niqab nor one dressed in a short skirt would be seated across from a Muslim man: the first one would not be able to eat without revealing her face, while the second would not be able to sit in a position which is not offensive. Similarly, he argued further, sensibilities need to be taken into account in
society at large and accommodations need to be made (interview, 23.07.2011). In line with these thoughts, most Muslims believe that integration and accommodation needs to be a two way process, organic and mutual in nature. While many are prepared to compromise, they feel the need to be assured that what is given will also be returned, even if in other ways (interview, 26.07.2011).

The community agenda, based on its identification of communities which lead ‘separate lives’, by not adhering to the national community neither in thought nor in deed presented a challenge to the philosophy of multiculturalism, as well as a challenge for Muslim communities. Multiculturalism converged on the idea expressed from the side of Muslim community portraying integration as a two-way process. However, both the focus on the community and on national security shifted the national and local discussion towards a reformulation in terms of integration as a one-way avenue. The dialectic of moral categories attached to citizenship alienated Muslims, as it demanded cooperation and input while giving little in return (interview, 21.07.2011). Also, the importance given to official representation enhanced the process of elite segmentation that is well captured by Bonney: “from the perspective of the national debate over multiculturalism in 2006, two weaknesses might be observed. The first is that where the links between communities have developed, they were largely at the level of community leaders or opinion formers, not at the grassroots of the society” (Bonney and Le Goff, 2007). What is at stake is from one side the future of the multicultural legacy “It is this vision of a ‘community of communities and citizens’ which is now under attack by those who challenge the model of multiculturalism” (Bonney and Le Goff, 2007), but also the shape the Muslim communities can publicly take.
In Leicester integration takes on a specific dimension due to the demographics of the city. Because of the changing demography, the minority-majority balance in the city is likely to change in the near future. This feeds a continuous tension between different segments of the population within the city and a sense of fear for the white community: ‘This is also why I think many people are getting scared, what will happen if it turns out in the coming census that Muslims are a majority in the city? I would expect quite a reaction’ (interview, 24.07.2011). However, this dynamic based on demographics can also be expected to reverse. Just as Muslims live in the centre of Leicester as a consequence of the flight of wealthier white population, as Muslims also become wealthier, they also move towards the periphery. In the near future it can be expected that the number of Muslims living in Leicester proper will diminish (interview, 17.07.2011).

Although scholars have shown that the Muslim community has made the greatest advances on the local political level (Joppke, 2009: 455), in Leicester Muslims pride themselves more on civic initiatives. In Leicester, politics is not considered an important issue by representatives of the Muslim communities: Muslim identity is seen as better represented through initiatives stemming from grassroots which provide a template for national and even international forms of Muslim identification and access to specific resources, such as the case of Muslim burial provisions, mediated through the Muslim Burial Council of Leicestershire. This institution is important for Muslims in Leicester because it builds on membership in the transnational ummah, without being political in nature. At the same time it started as a grassroots organisation, but is now active on the national level as the expert on Muslim burials and is consulted by other countries as well.

The sense of pride (this pride I have encountered only in Leicester) coming from
the grassroots of the society is made clear in processes such as contribution from an Islamic engagement to the society as a whole, cooperation with other faiths and the development of a collective religious Muslim consciousness which goes across sectarian divides and the development of specific Muslim provisions. The last-mentioned point is connected also with issues of cultural sensitivity towards specific religious needs and, as I will point out further on, is also an example of powerful connection between the local, national and global religious and (trans)national levels.

Muslims in Leicester are proud of the organisations they have, the institutions that work both on the local and the national level. Different organisational shapes have been tried over the years, from associations, councils and advisory groups to federations. However, from the point of view of Muslims in Leicester federations work best as an institutionalised form of the community because ‘the federation has a structure where people are selected for two-year positions and then have committees underneath, which are thematic. Because it is elected it is responsible to the electorate and 50,000 Muslims in Leicester, there is transparency and the mandate to speak for the community’ (interview, 23.07.2011). Further, federations work across many smaller community organisations, unifying their voice and constructing a clear message. Because Muslim organisations are often co-opted in governing processes, or given specific tasks in inclusive policies such as Community Cohesion and Prevent, it is important for them to be able to claim legitimacy for the community they are representing. Thus, election of elites is taking place at all levels and a clear organisational structure is adopted. However, in Leicester most of the important functions are held by a handful of people, most of them managing multiple tasks. From such representatives it is expected to be critical,
both towards the government but also towards their communities (interview, 21.07.2011). However, certain segments of the Muslim communities are better represented at the elite level, and thus have a better chance of turning negotiations in the civil sphere in their favour.

Indeed, some Muslim groups feel neglected, not only because of the unequal distribution of material resources, but also because they feel left out from places of power. The smaller Ismaili community feels neglected both by the local government and the national branch office. Because they do not participate officially in policy implementation, they lack the necessary resources to make a visible social impact and they have less access to appropriate housing for their centre/mosque. Further, the national Ismaili community thinks of them as a provincial group, thus resources and control are refused, the local communities being excluded especially from the coordination and management of larger community events (interview, 15.02.2012).

Keeping together the communities requires effort ‘because there are differences in every faith and there are differences in Islam as well, so we have to find a way to hold people together’ (interview, 23.07.2011). An informal form of community bonding are football and cricket matches, with a team of Muslim imams playing against Christian clergy under the association of the Federation of Muslim Organisation and the St. Philips centre. In these events Muslim clergy have to form a team together, against ‘sectarian divides’ and play with representatives of other faith(s). The Muslim communities ‘gel together’ with the help of informal activities and this translates into a possibility for cooperation beyond the sports field. This model of Muslim community consolidation and interaction with other faith groups has been so successful that it has been exported to
Sweden and Germany, across ummah networks (interview, 23.07.2011). These sport events are also organised between police and imams so that ‘fear of the role is removed, they are seen as human beings and not met only at the police station, when you have a need, when you have a problem’ (interview, 24.07.2011).

Muslims in Leicester are positive about the role of religion in British society. In general, they believe that religion is considered a positive social force, in spite of society’s secular character. ‘Brits are not shy about religion, you can also see this from the big advertisements hanging visibly on churches with the time of the mass’ (interview, 17.07.2011). The church has also proved to be an ally since the Rushdie affair, considering Muslims a religious group and sharing many interfaith initiatives. However, Muslims often argue publicly that equal opportunities should be given to various religious groups. The historic heritage of the Anglican Church is something to be emulated by other faith institutions as well, through required equality in opportunities and treatment.

Besides the church, alliances are also forged on specific issues and in different power relations. The relationship between the Muslim communities and the Jewish community in Leicester is illustrative: they work together because ‘our dietary requirements, our burials, our prayers and other issues like circumcision are common to both faiths. The Jewish community is very small, 450 people as compared to 50,000 Muslims, so we take the lead, but we work in cooperation with them to make sure we help them whatever their needs are’ (interview, 21.07.2011). Of course here, besides help and support, it also counts that an interfaith or across-faiths claim is often more likely to succeed when considered by the secular nation-state and the different governmental
Thus, Muslimness in the context of Leicester can be seen to evolve together with multiculturalist approaches arguing for equality (with other religions, lack of discrimination, inclusion). However, at the national level these Muslim claims are seen as ‘politics of difference’ that stress the exceptionality of Muslim communities. While often Muslims are perceived as going against both liberal individualism and secularism, from the example of Leicester we see that Muslims proceed according to British standards and discourses and engage with local policy frameworks. Those Muslim communities that do not actively take part as partners actions initiated by the local municipality are independent, manage themselves and raise their own funding. As Vertovec suggests, we can talk about a ‘horizontal spread’ of the Muslim community in Leicester, with diversity running both across a complexly organized and fractured community and a distinct pattern of localised need catering (1997).

Conclusion

The examples above suggest that religion in Leicester is more than a personal and private affair. As it is at the basis of a negotiated collective identity and informs a series of collective actions, it functions as civil religion (Bellah 1967). Muslims in Leicester are visible and active as Muslims, forging interfaith alliances as well as providing mobilisation examples beyond the urban space they live in. Further the specific interpretation of the way civility is understood by Muslims in Leicester is filtered through policies on the local and national level. These policies, in their turn, build the concept of citizenship from a collective British imaginary of the nation and the people.
Muslims in Leicester are making use of local and national policies while grassroots resources they interpret and actively engage with discourses of citizenship, race, ethnicity and multiculturalism, but they see themselves, as most Muslims in Britain, foremost as a religious group. As such they see both advantages and disadvantages in the way group targeted policies work: on the one hand, through group specific policies much needed resources are distributed and institutionalisation is enhanced, on the other hand, all benefits come at the cost of the stigma attached to the group: the stigma of being suspected of terrorism, radicalism and separatism.

The revival of religion, if we can call that the high social and political importance Muslimness enjoys in Leicester, has been made possible by the conceptual language of multiculturalism from the early 1970s onwards, especially the stress on equality. In the name of religion Muslims fight for equality seen as evenhandedness between different religions and ethnic groups but also for faith-specific rights, such as the right to die and be buried according to specific religious guidelines. Muslims also recognise the political significance of a collectivity united by religion, and thus, they are also active in the political sphere. Further, many organisations, local and national populate the territory between civic and political, pointing out that faith is much more than an individual and personal affair.

Muslims fight for a lack of discrimination on the basis of religion: this aim has already been achieved in 2003 in the area of employment, while specific questions introduced in the Census point out that awareness of the importance of religion is growing. Further, through interfaith activities and informal sports meetings between religious groups a collective idea of religion as important part of social life is constructed,
as community members argue, for the collective good.

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