Double Discrimination: An Examination of the Career Destinations of Muslim Women in Britain

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For most Muslim women, it is these changing circumstances, this ebb and flow in the fortunes of Muslim communities that they have had to negotiate and which the young generation of Muslim women growing up in this country are now confronting. This generation of respondents perceived that there is a lack of comprehension by the older generation of the teachings of the Qu'ran. They believe that this older generation is bound by culture rather than religion while they themselves, are more educated and aware of the 'precise' teachings of Islam.

Background

Muslim communities in Britain represent 1.5 million out of the 55 million of the total population, being the largest and the least researched ethnic minority in the UK context. Although there is an increasing research interest in exploring issues related to the interface of ethnicity, gender, educational provisions and career opportunities, little is known about the educational and job experiences of Asian women in general, and women of Islamic orientation in particular. This study builds upon a series of longitudinal research activities on issues related to gender, career opportunities and the changing notions of feminism in non-western societies.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study was to explore inter-relationships among ethnicity, religion, gender and education in women from Muslim background. The specific objectives were:

1. To provide an overview (demographic details) of Muslim communities in Britain;

2. To examine the position of Muslim women in Britain, their educational experiences and career destinations; and

3. To explore the interface among religion, gender, employment opportunities and education within the Islamic context.

Related Research and Theoretical Perspectives

Previous work in this area has focused on the destinations and career aspirations of either South Asian or ethnic minority girls, and tends to fall into one of four categories.

i) Work in which girls are asked to describe their career aspirations such as studies by Sharif (1985), and Hussain and Samarsinghe (1987). There is little in-depth analysis involved, but this work provides a useful source of data concerning the girls' preferences for different career destinations. This research considers the aspirations of girls who span a range of academic ability and who thus aspire to a number of different career paths, some of which are professional such as medicine or the law, while others are vague such as 'working with children'. The work highlights their concerns about the lack of careers advice, but does not take the argument any further.

ii) This category consists of studies which attempt to compare the aspirations of South Asian and African-Caribbean adolescents with those of their White peers or each other. Roberts, Duggan, and Noble (1981), and Lee and Wrench (1984) argue that African Caribbeans reflect the attitudes and aspirations of the White working class in choosing to be nurses, secretaries or to work in libraries, while South Asian girls aspire to be doctors, engineers or scientists. These studies are simplistic on two broad fronts. First they assume a polarized dichotomy between the ethnic groups studied and secondly they fail to address the questions and issues focused around the gendering and racialization of the labor market.

iii) In the third category there is research which highlights the effect of parental and cultural influence on the career aspirations of girls from different backgrounds. Joly (1984) notes that Mirpuri parents in Birmingham object to their daughters becoming nurses, but not doctors and that this is rationalized in terms of status of such work in Pakistan. Ahmed and Wilson (1978) suggests that there is evidence that the attitudes of South Asian parents to their daughters' education and subsequent career possibilities varies greatly with religion, and socio-economic background. Siann and Khalid (1984) highlight the practice of purdah and the related concept of 'izzat' where the honor of the family is dependent on the conduct of the female members of that family suggesting that the career chosen by the daughters should be sufficiently prestigious for izzat to be satisfied or enhanced (see also Jeffery, 1979; Mandelbaum, 1990). In a more recent study Siann and Khalid(1990) point to the lack of parental knowledge about employment opportunities and careers, inferring that although parents are ambitious for their daughters in terms of higher education and careers, they possess very little knowledge and have limited access to information and therefore these families are disadvantaged in this respect. In another study the careers service is implicated in this lack of knowledge (Brooks, 1983).

Studies which emphasise the over-aspiration of South Asian boys and girls and their high academic achievement and which base their analysis on the 'cultural clash' model must also be mentioned here (Tanna, 1990). This model is based on the assumption that the South Asian girl has to negotiate two cultures that of home and school and the focus of the clash is the arranged marriage. Such an argument ignores assumptions by teachers and careers officers that these girls are destined for an arranged marriage (McBeath, Mearns, & Smith, 1986); the difficulties experienced when applying for work (Brooks, 1983) and more centrally the issues of gender and class which impinge on the structuring of the labor market.

The use of the cultural clash model of analysis meant therefore that any discussion of institutionalized racism as constraints on the career opportunities of South Asian girls was avoided (Ahmed & Wilson, 1978; Amos & Parmer, 1984; Iquabal, 1980).

More recent research acknowledges that the influences within schools, teachers, administrators and peer groups create alternative forms of gender identity which are frequently based on ethnicity (Grant, 1992; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Williams, 1987); these complex relations emerge from continuing interactions, which persist into and beyond higher education and into the labor market. Within female dominated areas of employment for example, women from ethnic minority groups are most often found in the lowest tier of jobs (Beechey, 1986). Women are channeled into 'appropriate areas' of the labor market, which are those already dominated by women, and accordingly the spaces available to ethnic minority women are particularly narrow. Research projects concerned with higher qualifications reveal that those from minority ethnic groups have certain differences in their career paths. They are, for example, more likely to be unemployed for longer periods of time than White graduates and tend to obtain jobs of a lower status (Brennan & McGeevor, 1987; Johnes & Taylor, 1989). This category therefore includes several recent studies which have identified the issues associated with 'race', culture and ethnicity and placed them in a wider and historical content from which to explore the gendering and racialization of labor markets (Beechey, 1986; Phizacklea, 1990; Walby, 1990; Bhavani, 1991; Penn & Scattergood, 1992). Brah (1993) proposes that it is crucial to conceptualize the labor market as mediated by "race", class, gender, ethnicity, age, disability and sexuality. She further suggests a framework for analysis which conceptualizes structure, culture and agency as inextricably linked and integral to such a framework so that the relationship of young Muslim women to the labor market is seen to be structured by a multiplicity of ideological, and cultural factors.

Structural factors then such as the impact of the global and national economy on local labor markets; the discourses concerning the ideological positions of young Muslim women in relation to home and family responsibilities, or career destinations; racism and the women's own perspectives on such issues are all important considerations for this piece of research. From a conceptual and theoretical framework situated within consideration of a historical context, the research will attempt to develop an understanding of the cross cutting at both macro and micro levels to explain the position of young Muslim women in relation to the labor market and the implications for the future. Moreover, within this framework of analysis the research will aim to explore issues behind the under-representation of Muslim women in the labor market and institutions of higher education, and their perceptions and experiences of paid employment and education institutions.

This topic is positioned within discourses on cultural diversity and the extent to which societal equity is in place for women of an Islamic orientation. Secondly, the study draws on debates around feminism and notions of liberation and empowerment for non-White, non-Christian women. Notions of feminism that are unique to Islamic societies are explored in an attempt to provide an insight regarding the lives and obstacles that women of color face. Equity within Islam not without it, is the pursuit of many Muslim women who may not necessarily relate to western notions of feminism which have no reference point to their own lived experience. Thirdly, society needs not only to recognize cultural diversity as a reality but also to value the contribution minority communities make to society. The labor market implications from understanding the educational and job-related experiences of Muslim women are particularly important. Ethnic minority groups have a stake in society and their value should be acknowledged through equitable treatment. Finally, this study draws on our previous examination of post-16 opportunities (Irving, 1985); and the role of the careers service (Irving, 1993).

THE STUDY

We began our research on the educational provisions of Muslim children 10 years ago (Parker-Jenkins,

1991; Parker-Jenkins, 1993; Parker-Jenkins & Haw, 1997; Haw, 1991; Haw, 1993). It was a comparative analysis of Muslim girls' experiences as presented through discussion groups, questionnaires and account from the girls who volunteered to talk about their experiences. The most compelling finding was girls' desire to achieve equality within Islam not without it, engaging in a discourse of what it means to be a Muslim woman and articulating their sense of equality within the religion (Parker-Jenkins and Haw 1996). They also raised concerns about the barriers to Higher Education or Further Education. The critical issue was career destinations that do not compromise religious adherence. This earlier work thus helped inform the present Leverhulme project.

Muslim women presently constitute an unknown percentage of the workforce in Britain, and we know very little about their career patterns, choices of employment or career destinations. They are often perceived as an 'invisible' and unobtrusive element of the labor market and are under-utilized in terms of their potential as human resources contributing to the economy. The central objectives of this research were: 1) to develop a fuller understanding of the intersections between gender, class, ethnicity, racism and religion, and how such a multiplicity of factors inscribe the position of Muslim women in the labor market. 2) To analyze the role that educational and career institutions play in encouraging or discouraging young Muslim women along certain paths of education and employment, and thus the reasons for their career destinations and advancement in the United Kingdom (UK).

Aims of the Study

Drawing on our earlier work and contacts with Muslim communities in Britain, we approached several Muslim schools concerning their present year eleven (15-16 year olds) and former pupils, with regard to the feasibility of the study, and the question of access to information. Based on this initial fieldwork we secured the necessary permission and cooperation for the project, and then developed a research design. This has involved in-depth interviewing of a sample of Muslim girls aged 16-24 in 4 target areas in the Midlands and the North of England, to include research of: education experience, careers advice, career destination, further educational opportunities, parental/community/religious influences, post-school issues, and opportunity structures.

Modes of Inquiry

This study is based on an empirical investigation of the educational and career opportunities of Muslim women in Britain. Generally, a qualitative research methodology was used drawing on notions of ethnography in terms of testing emerging hypothesis and collecting rich and highly contextualized evidence. A longitudinal inquiry of this under-represented group was conducted by employing in-depth interviews on a sample of Muslim women in four geographical locations selected in such a way as to reflect Muslim settlements and population concentration in the UK. This study was funded by the Leverhulme Trust for £77,000 ($125,000), for 3 years commencing in 1995 and being due for completion in 1998. The participants were school administrators, teachers, former students, parents and pupils located in established Muslim schools and communities.

The research methodology employed was that of 'grounded theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Richner, 1975; Gehrike, 1982; Hutchinson, 1988). This approach is particularly appropriate since it allows the researcher to imaginatively explore aspects of life within communities and institutions by adopting a systematic method to study the complexity and diversity of human experience; it assists in generating relevant theory. It allows the researcher to attempt to understand the participants' perspectives on their world, through their own eyes, and to understand the modes of cultural arrangement, social processes and structures which shape their world. From this understanding of 'contextual reality', educators can assess what is happening and plan strategies.

The aim of the research was not the verification of a predetermined idea but discovery of new insights to facilitate depth of understanding. A guiding assumption of grounded theory is that people do have patterns of experience, and whilst their world may appear to be 'disordered or nonsensical' to the observer, there is an intrinsic order and sense to the participant (Hutchinson, 1988). As Berger and Luckmann (1967) maintain, "reality is a social construct" and patterns of experience derive from symbolic interaction. The study directly focused on the phenomenon and allowed those who were studied to speak for themselves and explain their own sense of reality. The research approach thus used multiple data collection methods: direct observation, in-depth interviews, and comparative analysis etc. to provide a wealth of information. This is in keeping with what Glaser and Strauss (1967) called "slices of data" to ensure diversity, and different perspectives of the social phenomenon. Finally, in addition to appointing a Muslim research assistant to the project, we also established a panel of advisors, predominantly representative of Muslim communities with expertise in Islam, Muslim schooling, the careers service and the Department for Education and Employment, to help inform our practice.

Data Sources

1) Quantitative methodology procedures were used to collect demographic information about Muslim women in four geographical locations (ie, Nottingham, Leicester, Derby and Bradford) across UK;
2) qualitative evidence was collected via individual open-ended interviews; and
3) information about career offices and employers in these geographical areas was gathered via surveys.

SUMMARY OF EMERGING ISSUES

Methodologically this research proceeds, as detailed in the previous section, from a theoretical framework which draws on:

'perspectives which deal with fragmentation, hybridity and pluralism characteristic of the ever-changing economic, social and cultural context in which Muslim girls and women live their lives. At the same time the theoretical framework is one which is both rooted in a set of values which center on ownership, empowerment and in a commitment to seeking out critical perspectives based on open, focused interactions with concrete others' (Griffiths & Haw, 1996)

It is important to recognize that the common themes which have emerged so far are also fragmented by areas of difference and fractures. It is inevitable in a piece of research working with sensitive and very personal issues that both commonalties, but also differences and fragmentation will be evident. However, this also means that it is at the interstices of difference that spaces can be created in which these areas of disagreement and differences can provide new ways of theorizing and perceiving lived situations and hence to new ways of working and understanding.

The evidence to date is complex and has every likelihood of remaining so. This makes it difficult to paint an overall picture of the issues emerging from this research which does justice to the range and diversity of opinion amongst the Muslim girls and women who have participated in this work. It is important therefore to emphasize the realization that Muslim communities are not unitary and do not speak with a single voice. There are not just class and gender differences but also a number of political and religious differences as well. These communities are also multiracial, multicultural and multilingual and comprise of the largest religious minority in Britain today (Ashraf, 1986). It is this religious dimension which provides a uniting factor. These fragmentations of class, gender and political and religious differences will be addressed as the analysis proceeds, but for the moment it is the intention that the analysis which follows is one which services to highlight and 'flag up' those issues which need to be explored in depth taking into account these different perspectives, discourses and dimensions.

For the purposes of the preliminary analysis the data is being analyzed in the four major categories which guided the interview schedule and an additional one that emerged very strongly from this set of interviews. They are:

1) School Life/Experiences
2) Post-School Experiences
3) Family Background/Life
4) Attitudes to Work
5) Self-Motivation

Some of these categories will be explained in greater depth, but first we turn to consideration of one particular transcript conducted from the research which illuminates initial findings.

Mariam's Story

We have chosen Mariam as an individual case study because:

1) Many of the emerging categories from the analysis of all our interviews to date are exemplified by her life history; lack of support at school and college for her chosen career, self-motivation and determination, manoeuvring around discourses of 'Muslimness', and community 'gaze'.
2) She is in some respects both fairly typical and atypical at the same time.

Life History

Her parents arrived in this country 25 years ago. Her mother was not formally educated, her father was educated in the system in Pakistan because he was the only son. Her mother could not speak English, although she did and does attend English classes at the local women's center. Her written skills are not good. Her father is a section leader at a local bakery, supervising nine people. Her mother was from a poor family. She got married at an early age and has had seven children. She now looks after her first and pre-school grandchild while her daughter works.

All the children were educated over here. One sister has a Chemistry degree, another has a degree in Business Administration and is now a marketing assistant for Alpha Romeo. Another is in the second year of her Law Degree. One brother is doing a BTech National in Business and Finance, another want to be a car engineer. The others are still at school. Her older sister is married to Mariam's husband's brother and the second sister is also married to her youngest sister's brother-in-law.

Her father did not want the daughters to go away and study. It took him a long time to agree to it. They were all married on trips back to Pakistan. Mariam did not realize as she went out on one of these visits that she would be getting married. She stayed in the country for some months but has now returned to England leaving her husband in Pakistan to go through the relevant immigration procedures.

Mariam talks of the 'favoritism' shown to her brothers by her parents who get 'first best' and who are allowed more freedom in where they go and in times for coming home. She does understand this because of the gossip that runs rife:

'they start putting two and two together and making something really stupid...that's why they send daughters to Pakistan because the parents have thought that they have messed about with certain people'.

Mariam talks of the difference in standards of behavior between Asian men and women. She is quite vociferous in this respect. She worries about meeting men that she works with in the street in case they talk to her or in a friendly gesture put an arm around her and that this will be seen by someone from the

community who will relate it back to her family.

Throughout her time at school, her family were involved in working at home making lace. Mariam talks of working until two o'clock in the morning to deliver on time to avoid wage cuts and to keep the work coming into the household. She did this all through school, so that her homework suffered and she missed playing and going out with her friends. Her brothers were excused from the work.

From a very early age Mariam wanted to be an electrical engineer.

'Before school I knew actually. When I was about nine and a half, ten years old, I used to collect electrical gadgets and motors and used to like to buy radios from a shop and break them up and put them back together again'.

She wanted to know how these things worked and she 'just loved that word electronics'. Her cousin was an electrical engineer and was an obvious influence.

Mariam went to an all girls state comprehensive school. When she told the teachers of her ambition they just said "Why?". They said that it was a difficult career to follow "especially for an Asian girl." She was well aware of the problems she would encounter and in her words, "the kind of barriers I would have to go through, they were a bit shocked and stunned." She was however, supported by her friends who 'were all for it'. She did Physics, Biology, Maths, Art, English and Technical Services and an engineering course at a local FE college.

'We used to do welding work, pipes, plumbing we did loads of things, health and safety for the workforce. I loved it. I got three credits and a merit. I really enjoyed doing it, for the practical I got 87%.

She got three C's and two B's but her Maths was weak and that was a problem for her. She loved her school years. She agrees with the saying that the school years are the best years of your life. She wasn't disruptive. She was totally dedicated to working hard, passing her exams so she could pursue her ambition to do something she always wanted to be. She was disappointed in her teacher's reactions to her chosen career. She felt that she got very little help or support from the careers' teacher:

'she wasn't that forthcoming, she wasn't that helpful at all. She would always give you, you know textiles and stuff like that, you might get a job in textiles and I said I am not interested in textiles or home economics or you know like girly, girly jobs, you know sewing, knitting and cooking cakes all day. I thought I'm not going to do that, no way. I want to be an electrical engineer'.

She states that while she was growing up she knew of no Asian women or even a White woman who did a job like this but she was determined. In the end she went to what she calls a careers' drop in center. They were supportive. She struck up a relationship with one particular careers advisor in.....She was really good. When I left school she told me about the college course in electronics".

She got in touch with this person through her sister who mentioned to her that Mariam wanted to be an electrical engineer. She was influential and extremely helpful in understanding Mariam's situation and ambition. Her father had already said that he would allow her to do a course as long as it wasn't mixed sex.

'So when I heard about an all girls course at....college, I thought that looks tasty, that looks good. She was the one who told me about it, she said, "Mariam it is a two year course and you get a BTech National, it's equivalent to A Levels so have a bash at it." I went and enrolled in August.

Mariam got quite a lot of 'stick' from her brothers.

'They used to give me a lot of heartache, a lot of trouble. My mum said, "do an A level course, do Chemistry, do something like your sister was doing or do a Law degree or something....." She would always like to go on at me all the time. My family found out that I was doing this at college, from my friends - "why's she doing this?"

The class initially had 15 girls in and by the end of the course there was only five left.

'They all dropped out because of the kind of attitudes of the tutors. I used to get so mad. I used to think why are they saying this. Some of the tutors were awful, they didn't turn up and one was quite sexist. He said, "Girls, do you really see yourselves getting a job. I don't think so." And I'm like totally gobsmacked, complete shock, from a lecturer who is like a father figure because he was about 50.... and I go, "Sir, what's your problem?" He goes, "Well, I', just telling you girls, I'm just letting you know." You needed some kind of personal development, some encouragement but they didn't give it to you. A lot of vibes were really negative, so a lot of the girls didn't turn up. One girl wanted to work with the Royal Navy. She was clever and more than capable, but she left. There were work placements which were badly organized and 'shoddy and bore little resemblance to any sort of electronics work'.

By the end of the course, Mariam was so fed up, she came to believe that the tutor was right, there would be no job. The lecturers were all male, there was a female personal tutor who also gave little support. She relates how her determination blinded her to advice from her family, particularly her father who she felt was envious of her. At the end of her course, she passed everything with a merit in technical drawing electronics, but her maths had always been a problem and she got no support in this aspect of her course.

'that's where it all fell apart because I didn't get any support, I nearly changed my course but something in the back of my mind said, "No, Mariam you're going to be an electrical engineer. You're going to do electronics." I was like lost in a maze.'

Mariam has had great difficulty finding a job since leaving college. She realized that this would always be a difficulty for her. She applied for several electrically orientated jobs but did not get interviewed for any of them. Again, the Careers person with whom she had struck up a relationship, gave her a lot of support, particularly with form filling in and letter writing, going through her applications and giving her advice. It was at this point that she had time on her hands. She began at the local Youth Center and from there has made many contacts with different local organizations. She also became involved with the care line and action line of the local radio stations. She became a 'link' worker, finding out what all the different organizations were doing, such as open days, events, training days and seminars and publicizing them on the radio. Her contacts have grown. The electronics idea has all gone now and "I don't think about it anymore, although it is still in the back of my mind."

She is now doing many different voluntary jobs, by helping out here and there, she has become a popular local figure whose contacts are invaluable to many. She says, "I love helping people, I love meeting people." She runs a support group for Asian careworkers at the moment which meets once a month. She doesn't mind working with her own community although it came about quite by accident. She uses her language skills but the work is short-term, part-time and insecure. She has had to augment her wages by working in a Nursing Home. She has however, had to give this job up because of harassment by the other workers who she felt took advantage of her. She describes how the workers on the duty before her used to leave all their jobs for her, especially the more horrible jobs like cleaning people up after 'accidents'. She also describes how people used to either deliberately mispronounce her name or call her by an English name. For these reasons she feels her decision to leave has been a good one although she is now worried that she will be unable to keep up the mortgage repayments on her house. The pay from her jobs in the voluntary sector is insufficient in this respect.

Mariam also describes the difficulties of working within her own community in terms of confidentiality, the community gossip network and the problems of competing with other Asian people for the few jobs there are. "It's not what you know, it's who you know." She believes that her ideas 'get pinched' and 'they (the managers) get full credit for that.' She feels at times that she gets little recognition and no personal development and speaks of nepotism within the Asian community.

'You don't really get any support within the Asian community. They tend to like to put you down all the time. They never like, let you get anywhere, the management do, but the workers don't get anywhere. Jobs go to cousins and things like that. They advertise it to like, to make it equal opportunities. I applied for a job as a community care worker. I didn't get it. I was really cheesed off. I thought it happens. I know it does, that's why the community is suffering because there are people who have got no education. They've got no knowledge about the needs of the Asian community, but people aren't working on those needs. They're working on looking after themselves.'

She talks of the need for educating Asian men because the women are suffering from family, community, culture and religious pressure.

Her family, especially her father, wish that she would get a full-time job rather than her many part-time jobs. They did not ask her to get married when she left school at 16 like many of her friends and she appreciated having the time to do a college course.

Her friends, who have children now, and who believed that they could train and find work after having had children, are finding life tough. Mariam got married at 22 and even then feels that her mother could have waited a little longer. She feels she has been lucky in that she was not married earlier. Fortunately for her there were no suitable offers. She believes in the need to work and in a career because:

'You've got the financial backup, you know your rights. When you haven't got a job and when you are at home, you are not doing anything for society, for the community, for nobody really.'

RESULTS

A number of categories have emerged from the data highlighted in Mariam's case study thus far, but an overwhelming finding is the perception that Muslim women have to work at least twice as hard to succeed.

For practicing Muslim girls, mixing with the opposite sex was an issue they had to deal with. Members of the opposite sex, especially non-practicing were at times perceived to hold a low opinion of them believing them to be oppressed and controlled. Many Muslim girls who are practicing, talked of hostility from students, lecturers and employers. This is a point which needs to be recognized here; the stereotypical image others have of practicing Muslim women as fundamentalists:

'I found it very difficult to adapt to University lifestyle because I am a practicing Muslim. It was difficult to make the boys understand that I wanted only a working relationship and nothing else.'

The evidence is contradictory here. While some girls, it must be said, those who largely attended mixed-sex state schools, found no difficulty in communicating with men, in feeling able to voice their opinions, feeling less inferior, actively participating in discussions in an educational or work environment; other expressed the opposite view. This was usually those girls who had attended a Muslim girl's school or a single-sex state school.

There has been a gradual change in the attitudes of parents towards education and sometimes this has manifested itself as different siblings pass through the system so that it is often very much easier for

younger children to persuade their parents to let them do their chosen courses or job.

'It's timing isn't it because at that time our parents weren't as broad-minded as they are now. It was like all due to time really. When I did get my results they were really pleased with what I did, not wasted five years at school and it was really easy for me. I said I'm going to college and that's it.'

Interviewees suggested that this gradual change is due to a realization that education capital is necessary for survival in a modern, rapidly changing society. One wage earner in the family is not enough either financially or in terms of security of employment. Participants also made the point that increasingly Muslim men are looking for educated partners so that this 'cultural capital' is as essential as caste, family and material circumstances and potential. Whereas in the past it was only seen to be necessary for the sons to be educated now this holds equally true for daughters. Education is seen as a tool for progression, a bargaining chip for work, marriage and status:

'Just having one breadwinner in the family is difficult, education is a respectable way to earn money if needed.'
'It is important to have some education as that is the only way to find a husband who is himself educated.'
'Well I think it was mostly my parents who influenced me. My Dad's always stressed the importance of education and in the Qu'ran you see the emphasis is on education and I've always had like my parents support.'

Religious/Cultural Interpretations of Islam or Discourses of 'Muslimness'

This category is very much linked to the following category of inter-generational pressures. For the purposes of clarity they will be dealt with separately at this point in the research. This is a category which was also in evidence in our last project, an ethnography of a Muslim girls' school, (Parker-Jenkins & Haw, 1996) and which at the time we found useful to analyze using the term 'discourses of Muslimness'. It is one which we intend to develop further.

All religions are open to political, ideological and symbolic interpretations which are fluid and shifting. This is true of Islam, a religion and a 'way of life'. What was politically and socially expedient for one generation living in and through a particular context is not the same for another. When Muslim communities go through a period of instability, it is those disempowered groups such as women, the poor and the uneducated who have had to submit to greater degrees of suppression than at times of success and optimism. This is done through claims for the necessity to adhere to absolute laws embedded in the text of the Qu'ran and it is at times of crises that the return to this position is advocated through stricter controls and rejection of those who fail to conform. Not all Muslim women are equally affected because there are divisions, as always, along class, cultural, national and traditional lines, with old aristocratic and wealthy families using their position and/or wealth as a means of negotiation with the dominant power. For most Muslim women, it is these changing circumstances, this ebb and flow in the fortunes of Muslim communities that they have had to negotiate and which the young generation of Muslim women growing up in this country are now confronting. This generation of respondents perceived that there is a lack of comprehension by the older generation of the teachings of the Qu'ran. They believe that this older generation is bound by culture rather than religion while they themselves, are more educated and aware of the 'precise' teachings of Islam. This is causing a Culture versus Religion struggle which can be compared to the western culture versus eastern culture which was evident in the past:

'Parents want you to be Muslim but not the way the Qu'ran outlines but what they have chosen to be regarded as Islam.'
'When I question what they are telling me about Islam and then correct them they argue back saying that it is not acceptable by the community even though I am right. This causes friction between us.'

Community Pressures/Extended Family Pressure

Once again the primary issue to be identified here is the clash between culture and religion or discourses of 'Muslimness'. The older generation was perceived to value community values and opinions. These are often those voiced by community leaders and spokesmen about Islam, or powerful members of the kinship group. They see this as a form of guidance which comes as a direct link from the parent culture and which as immigrants it is important for them to retain. The issue of being accepted and respected within the community is very high on their agendas and seen to be necessary to their quality of life. Often this seems not to coincide with their daughters' values and therefore happiness.

'It is so frustrating when my Dad says that I understand but this isn't acceptable in our community. They are always concerned with what everyone else will say and we have to reform to their way of thinking. There's no point in arguing because if you rebel you will be disowned.'

'Luckily I don't have any relatives here because relatives can put a lot of pressure on the family itself. Sometimes if the parents let you choose whether you want an arranged marriage or choose your own husband, they will let you but if the relatives put a lot of pressure on that family they won't let you. I have got no relatives here so I'm quite lucky. You feel a bit lonely but I am happy they're not here to put pressure on.'

Respondents articulated conflict in finding and coming to terms with their own selves. They were juggling with trying to fit in with the culture of school, college, university or work with that of their immediate family, the extended family and the community. Although it has been debated and argued in the past there remains the issue of maintaining a sense of belonging in an increasingly fragmented private and public sphere of balancing the cultures.

'It is so difficult to make parents understand that university life is different from what they think and afterwards they expect us to fit back into their way of thinking and lifestyle. What is the point of educating ourselves, trying to better ourselves if we can't even make our own decisions.'

Self-Motivation

This is a theme which emerged so unexpectedly strongly that it is worthy of a separate category. Despite an articulated awareness of difficulties and problems facing them for religious/cultural reasons, racial reasons and considerations of declining employment in traditional professions, the girls were ambitious. Self-motivation and a desire to prove others wrong and to be seen to 'succeed' were dominant factors in pursuing chosen careers.

'I've always been discouraged, like not by my parents or anything but like at college I was doing politics and everything and the message is that all the really top dogs are white, middle class males. It's kind of scary because I'm defined as a Muslim woman and it's like I'm scared to go into something, I don't want to go into something where I end up not talking about things....It's just that, I can't explain it, I just have this great love of debate and I really feel comfortable thinking about philosophy, issues politics and debating them. I would like to pursue them and if I couldn't I would like to at least try something that has politics related to it....I would like to be an MP. I'm doing British politics now. If I could I would like to go to Westminster. The thing is I don't want to have it as like an obstacle because I want to show people that I can. If I can do it then they can. I am a Muslim; I am Asian and I am female and I can do it. I feel that a lot of um Muslim people um especially are really downhearted because they don't see the Muslim political leaders are up there so we need to get more of them out there then they can set examples to younger generations, like my brother. I feel that I have to set an example to him and then when he grows up he can say, "Look my sister can do it."

Anything I have done I have done off my own bat and I have got a pat on the back from other people outside (my family and school). I want my own business at the end of the day that's why I changed from Nursing to Travel. I can't get my own business (in Nursing) and I want to work for myself. I want to show people that I can do something and that I think part of that is because of my parents who feel I can't do anything. It's a wrong way to go about it in that I want to do it and show people I can do it, to prove them wrong.'

Another respondent talked about her first failure to get accepted on an NNEB course as follows: 'I think it was discrimination. I know other people who got on the course straight from school. It makes you wonder even though I had done voluntary work. I had to do all that and the part-time play leader job and other O Levels. All those three things to get onto the course. I know it's going to be difficult for me to succeed in a well-known business company, with me wearing an hejab but that is what I want to do.'

Balancing a family life was also high on individual agendas and pursuing a career was seen as important for the self-development and independence, as well as being of advantage for the education of their children.

The findings from this study demonstrated that Muslim women in the workplace face double discrimination based on grounds of gender and religious adherence. There are several reasons that may explain this situation. Recently, there have been a growing "Islamophobia" in Britain, due in part to the Rushdie Affair and the Gulf War, resulting in overlooking the huge differentiation among Muslim communities and, thus, coloring the ethos of these communities as being stereotypical "fundamentalists" (Yuval-Davis, 1992). Increasing awareness of the existing discriminatory patterns and their consequences points to the understanding that we cannot afford to waste the talents of sections of our society. Instead, we need to challenge iniquities practices and unnecessary obstacles to educational provisions and career progression and career progression among minority group women.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to setting the inquiry and expanding existing theoretical models of cultural diversity as it relates to the educational provisions and career opportunities of women from under-represented ethnic groups. Understanding these issues is of paramount importance in supporting policy and legislation aiming at equity in the treatment of ethnic minority women and contributing to practice by providing guidance to educators, career officers, employers and community leaders. Research and practice that is culturally sensitive is crucial in combating discriminatory process/mechanisms that are currently in place regarding the education and employment of people of color.

CONCLUSIONS

As stated in the paper, the evidence to date is complex and has every likelihood of remaining so. This makes it difficult to paint an overall picture of the issues emerging from this research which does justice to the range and diversity of opinion amongst the Muslim girls and women who have participated in this study. We end therefore by emphasizing the realization that Muslim communities are not unitary and do not speak with a single voice. There are not just class and gender differences, but also a number of political and religious differences as well. This fragmentation of class, gender, political, and religious differences will be addressed as the analysis proceeds, but for the moment it has been the intention of the analysis to highlight and 'flag up' those issues which need to be explored in depth taking into account these different perspectives, discourses and dimensions.

Specifically some participants talked of lack of support and motivation from their teachers as a whole and

believed that they should have been given greater guidance and individual attention. At the same time there were references to more effective support from family members or even friends rather than school staff. There are of course, always contradictions in any research finding, but again it seems to be emerging that teachers were not perceived as having high enough expectations for their Muslim students and often had some difficulty in relating to their needs so that Muslim girls were left behind at school academically or for those more determined, left to their own devices. The theme of self-motivation emerges strongly at this point.

It also emerges that there was a feeling that a more structured and informative approach was needed to career advice, which needed to involve not general guidance from a teacher in charge of careers, but such a teacher working alongside professional career officers who are brought into school at an early stage. Further that individuals need guidance from a range of sources, individual interviews, interviews with parents, general information for students, for parents. Also that community organizations who have a brief for training should also be involved. At this stage it would seem that there is scope for the Careers Service to be used more and to respond more. It would seem that there is scope for multi-agency action here by schools, LEAs, community organizations and this in relation to other sources of careers advice in FE colleges and universities in a co-ordinate and flexible approach organized by the Careers Service.

Finally, as we pointed out in the introduction, but it is worth repeating here, it is important to recognize that the common themes which have emerged so far as also fragmented by areas of difference and fractures. It is inevitable in a piece of research working with sensitive and very personal issues that both commonalties, but also differences and fragmentations will be evident. However this also means that it is at the interstices of difference that spaces can be created in which these areas of disagreement and differences can provide new ways of theorizing and perceiving lived situations and hence to new ways of working and understanding.

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