Youth Culture and Citizenship in Multicultural Britain

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ABSTRACT Across Europe and the western world debates on multiculturalism are shaping national and local policies on citizenship. How to reconcile the tensions between minority rights, cultural difference and the universal notion of citizenship in different nation states has become a central focus when considering how the inclusion of ethnic minority groups is being managed. At the heart of these discussions are concerns about the young and the processes of their inclusion as present and future citizens. In this paper we discuss how citizenship for young people from different ethnic groups is understood and constructed as a ‘problem’ in the UK, showing how issues of injustice, lack of recognition and problems of self-determination impact on feelings of membership and belonging. In the final section we discuss possible policy solutions and ways forward.

Introduction

Over the previous 20 years questions of citizenship have become of fundamental interest to different governments across Europe (Lister et al., 2007). In the UK the emphasis has been on tackling the social exclusion of the most marginalized groups and getting them back into work, employment and training as a way of increasing participation (Levitas, 1998). More recently, citizenship discussions have been dominated and fuelled by issues of ‘multiculturalism’ and its impact on a cohesive society. Questions of inclusion and the ‘good society’ have been shaped by anxieties over the impact multiculturalism is having on the stability of British society.

At the heart of these discussions are concerns about multicultural youth and their transitions into citizenship. Anxieties have arisen over the perceived lack of willingness and potential danger some alienated youth might pose to the social order in the UK. As a result the British government has developed a range of policies that aim to address these ‘problems’ with the intention of re-instating ‘Britishness’ and encouraging multicultural young people to become more active citizens. In the first part of this paper we discuss how the citizenship of young people, especially of those from different ethnic groups, is understood and constructed by the state. In these discussions we show how it is important that we recognise young people as a diverse group with different needs and interests and that they are not only in the process of making the transition to ‘adult citizen’ but also have a lived, everyday experience of citizenship that shapes their feelings of belonging and membership of British society. A critical feature of this is related to how their ethnic culture and identity is understood, how their cultural needs and activities are recognised and how they experience economic participation and the transitions to adulthood.

In the final section of the paper we turn our attention to how policy in this area might need
to develop to promote the inclusion of different ethnic groups and increase their participation as active citizens.

**Youth and Citizenship**

Citizenship is fundamentally concerned with membership and belonging to a defined community, the rights we receive for that membership and the responsibilities we need to undertake (Marshall, 1950). How citizenship is then constructed and operationalized at the national level can vary according to how nation states define these sets of relationships (Lister et al., 2007). In this sense it is more valid to talk about national ‘regimes’ of citizenship that recognize not only the diversity of how different countries define and understand citizenship, but also how external and internal processes exist as ways of including or excluding populations (Lister et al., 2007). Therefore, citizenship must be seen in both its historical and contemporary social contexts and cannot be divorced from the struggle over rights and opportunities (Lister et al., 2007). Citizenship can also be shaped and influenced by transnational factors such as the development of the European Union as a policy-making body that transcends nation states. However, what is absent from much of the recent political debate is a recognition that citizenship is a ‘lived’ state in which being a citizen is a social process where individuals are active in constructing themselves as citizens through norms, practices and meanings (Isin & Turner, 2002). Citizenship in this context is a more dynamic and negotiated process that can involve power struggles over who is to be included or excluded. It is, therefore, important to recognize that citizenship is not simply a legal status but also a socio-political practice of being recognized (Lister, 2007b).

When it comes to youth and citizenship the matter becomes more complex, because of the social understanding of the phase ‘youth’ and the concept of age. Youth as a social category has historically been constructed as a stage between childhood and adulthood. Youth as a legal definition constructs their citizenship as transitional. For example, legal rights to marry, to be employed, to join the Army, to leave home, to drive a car or to get access to social benefits are all fragmented, thus creating uncertainty about young people’s position as citizens (Jones, 2002). It is thus a state of limbo where the young are in transition from one state of being to another. This ‘in-betweenness’ gives young people limited status as citizens, and they are seen as ‘non-citizens’ or ‘citizens in-waiting’ (France, 2007). It is a stage in the course of life where a young person is thought to move from dependency to independency, yet in reality this process is neither linear nor guaranteed (Wyn & Dwyer, 1999). Nor is this transition universal or ‘natural’, being a set of social definitions embedded in an historical and cultural context (France, 2007). Youth is also greatly fragmented by age, gender and racialized identities. To see it as a homogeneous social category is to deny the different experiences different groups have of ‘being young’ (France, 2007). In late modernity adulthood itself is also fragmenting and understandings of what it means to be an adult are less clear (Thomson et al., 2004). As a result of social, economic and political changes youth as an ‘in-between stage’ in the course of life is changing (France, 2007). Young people are seen as ‘citizens in the making’ and as a result can be seen by nation states as ‘citizen workers of the future’ (Lister, 2007a). Government responses across Europe have, therefore, focused on how young people can be encouraged, educated, trained or forced to be better future citizens (Osler & Starkey, 2003). What such a position fails to recognize is the ‘lived citizenship’
of the young in their everyday lives (Smith et al., 2005). Recent debates in youth studies suggest that young people are social agents in their own right and active in constructing themselves, through negotiation, as citizens (Tisdall et al., 2006).

Multiculturalism, Citizenship and Youth

More recently the debate in the UK on citizenship has shifted to the question of the 'problems' of multiculturalism. Debates have focused on the integration of 'others' and 'outsiders', and this is seen as a major challenge for national governments in the 21st century (Modood, 2007). Recent debates have in part been driven by a growing anxiety about the state as a result of a wide range of national and global events and changes that are seen as threatening domestic cohesion and stability. These include the following.

- The fear of terrorism, especially after 9/11 and 7 July. A fear of external threats from fundamentalists and also of internal threats from 'British-born Terrorists'.
- The growth and influence across the globe of Islam and its relationship with western values and liberal democracy.
- The opening up of UK borders to EU nationals. With the recent expansion of the EU, this has brought in a large number of economic migrants from previous 'Eastern bloc' countries such as Poland. Concerns exist over the impact they have on the British economy, especially in relation to jobs, the housing market and public services.
- The growth of asylum seekers arriving in the UK from non-EU countries. Since the early 1990s the numbers entering the UK have increased, creating major social and economic challenges for the government in responding to their human rights responsibilities.
- Evidence of a lack of social cohesion and integration in the UK of black and Asian British nationals, especially around certain geographical areas. The 'race riots' in Bradford and Oldham in 2001 were seen as significant statements about the lack of social cohesion.

A number of symbolic events and debates have been used in the media to highlight the 'problem' of multiculturalism. For example, attention has focused on the wearing of the niqab in public by Muslim women, the role of faith schools in helping increase segregation and the 'growing' number of asylum seekers 'invading our shores'. These types of issues have been instrumental in shaping debates about notions of 'Britishness' or 'Englishness' and what it means to belong to, or be a member of, the nation state. In this context multiculturalism is seen as the problem, 'undermining' or 'threatening' Britishness, as it either 'weakens' it by requiring a recognition of 'minority' cultures and rights or defines 'Britishness' as 'unfair' or racist. This has resulted in a major public debate about what it means in late modernity to be 'British'. For example, a recent Fabian pamphlet by the political left argued that current debates around multiculturalism were too focused on celebrating differences and divisions instead of celebrating what we have in common. As a result policy should, it was argued, focus on helping people understand British values and way of life, with the aim of ensuring that 'citizenship isn’t simply handed out, but is something which is earned' (Liam Byrne, quoted in The Guardian, 5 June 2007, accessed online at www.guardian.co.uk/britain/article/0,,2095520,00.html on 5 June 2007).

At the heart of these debates have been questions about how to improve the integration of young people from different multicultural groupings. Concerns over young people being
‘recruited’ to terrorist movements, especially in deprived, areas but also in universities, has been shaping government policy (Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 2005). Anxieties have also existed over the seeming unwillingness of some British ethnic youth groups to accept ‘Britishness’ as a core aspect of who they are, seeing ‘being a Muslim’ or Asian or black as more important to their everyday identity. Issues around black gang culture, gun crime and the seeming lack of respect of young black males for authority are usually produced as symbols of their lack of engagement with the responsibilities of British citizenship. It is not unusual for these perceptions to construct young black or Asian males as ‘others’ or ‘outsiders’ and create a view of them as criminal and disrespectful citizens (Alexander, 2004). Therefore, the debate is moving towards discussions of how to integrate these youths into mainstream society and encourage them to accept their responsibilities as active citizens.

Tackling Citizenship for Multicultural Youth

In 2000 New Labour rejected the Parekh Report and shifted the emphasis to seeing the problem as a ‘lack of cohesion’ and understanding of ‘Britishness’ and its values (Abbas, 2005). As a result, we see the British state construct policies that emphasize assimilation rather than multiculturalism (Beck et al., 2002). Since 2001 the policy on multiculturalism has shifted to one of ‘community cohesion’ (Abbas, 2005). This movement in policy constructs the problem as one of the failure of ‘others’ to integrate into British society, reinforcing place-bound notions of belonging and difference as dichotomous—being ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Worley, 2005). The problem is also constructed around how groups such as South Asians do not speak English at home and marry within the British Asian community, suggesting they are isolationist in their actions. Little attention is given to how white identities reinforce boundaries, how racism limits participation or how certain groups are economically and socially excluded. Belief in community cohesion has therefore set out a new policy framework for race relations (Worley, 2005) that looks at instilling values of Britishness and increasing the active participation of ethnic minorities as ‘responsible’ citizens. Simultaneously, the government has been developing policies to tackle terrorism and immigration. Combined, the policies towards race relations have been top-down and aimed at either controlling ‘dangerous’ groups, limiting the movement of ‘outsiders’ or increasing the assimilation of existing but ‘problem’ ethnic minority populations. Examples of such policies include the following.

- The introduction of citizenship education in 2002 as a compulsory subject within the national curriculum (1998 Crick Report on Citizenship Education), which aims to increase young people’s awareness of their responsibilities.
- In 2005 citizenship tests were launched as a requirement of new immigrants being made full citizens or obtaining settlement visas. This includes English language tests and knowledge tests about the UK.
- Youth Matters legislation (DfES 2005) introduced with a core objective of increasing young people’s social participation, especially in volunteering and civic responsibilities.
Increased restrictions on asylum seekers and new ways of dealing with them in detention, including the reduction of access to social and economic benefits and increased usage of detention centres and ‘fast tracking’ them through the system (Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 2002a, 2002b).

Other recent developments in education have also targeted the young. Teaching of diversity in schools has been varied (Department of Education and Skills [DfES], 2007) and as a result it is proposed that the secondary curriculum for citizenship education should now include an element entitled ‘Identity and diversity: living together in the UK’. This will mean that all pupils will now be taught about shared values and life in the UK, including an understanding of contemporary issues and the relevant historical context which gave rise to them (DfES, 2007). A second significant development has emerged out of the government’s attempt to tackle terrorism in Muslim communities in the UK. Concerns over the radicalization of Muslim youth has seen the government construct an action plan and preventative programme that targets those most at risk (Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 2005), and this has been implemented since 2005 (Department for Communities & Local Government, 2007). This includes road shows where mainstream scholars and thinkers have spoken to audiences of young British Muslims, the involvement of young Muslims in the UK Youth Parliament and greater attention paid to the needs of young Muslims in the new youth policy of Youth Matters.

The government has also been instrumental in putting forward a range of new ideas aimed at tackling the lack of social cohesion and integration in some areas of the UK and also in promoting an understanding within ethnic minority groups of what it means to be a ‘British’ citizen. This may include the introduction of ‘citizen packs’ for young people reaching 18 to inform them of their duties and responsibilities as citizens and the introduction of citizenship ceremonies to install a sense of what it means to be ‘part of Britain’. The government is also looking at the construction of a National Service in Volunteering for all young people to help them ‘play their part’ (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007). Also, asylum seekers are to earn points towards being granted citizenship for not breaking the law and doing voluntary work in which ‘Earned Citizenship is the next logical steps’ (Ruth Kelly, 5 June 2007). This includes the idea of good neighbourhood agreements to be signed at Local Authority level, ensuring ‘newcomers’ understand their civic responsibilities (Ruth Kelly, 5 June 2007). The government is also contemplating a British national day to celebrate ‘Britishness’, similar to Australia Day and Independence Day in the USA (Ruth Kelly, 5 June 2007) or a Community Week (Singh, 10 June 2007).

Challenges to Multiculturalism

Within these debates around community cohesion, multiculturalism has been presented as part of the problem. Perceptions and representations of multiculturalism used by government fail to recognize the diverse, evolving and creative nature of multicultural identities. Multiculturalism is represented as static, essentialist and quasi-fundamentalist, and these representations ‘hold persons forever captive in their group memberships’ (Siapera, 2006, p. 8). Such a position is a denial of the historical nature and changes that have taken place over time. In the UK multiculturalism has been undermined by debates over Britishness (Modood, 2007). Political and media anxieties over the impact of multiculturalism have been at the heart
of these processes, creating an essentialist model of what multiculturalism means. However, the arguments for Britishness need to recognize that ‘difference’ is a social construct that creates a false dichotomy between groups and individuals (Stevenson, 2003). ‘Difference’ is equated with diversity under the umbrella of the universal term multiculturalism. For example, it conflates the question of integration and assimilation of those born here in the UK and are second or third generation nationals with those who are newly arrived as immigrants or asylum seekers. Multiculturalism becomes a universal term that is used to locate all ethnic differences as being the same. This is how it is constructed and used in both political and media discourses. Multiculturalism as ‘difference’ is also concerned with the tensions it creates for citizenship, as it insists upon the importance of recognizing cultural difference and assumes that such ideas are threatening or challenging to universal notions of citizenship. Claims for ‘minority rights’ or the recognition of cultural differences are seen to undermine the dominant notion of universalism that is critical to liberalism and liberal democracy (Stevenson, 2003). In reality this concern with the particular over the universal is a misrepresentation of the issues that are important to inclusion.

**Multiculturalism and Cultural Citizenship**

In order to discuss the issues around the inclusion of ethnic minorities it is important to understand that the way in which different nations historically and currently deal with notions of entry, migration and internal integration of ethnic minorities has led to the development of different ‘regimes’ of multiculturalism (Lister *et al.*, 2007). The contextualizing of multiculturalism within a framework of ‘regimes’ not only allows a recognition of its fluidity and changing nature, but helps to locate the process of integration within both its historical and cultural context. European governments have approached these notions in a wide range of ways. For example, Germany has operated a form of ‘differential exclusion’ towards immigrants and ethnic minorities (Pilkington, 2003), giving access to the labour market but limited rights and citizenship. In France, citizenship rights have been expanded to a wide range of immigrants, but the expectation is that they will assimilate French cultural norms and practices, and intolerance is shown to those who refuse to do so (Pilkington, 2003). In countries such as the UK and The Netherlands multiculturalism is seen as more pluralist and is able to accommodate a large amount of difference. Yet, as outlined above, recent developments have seen these states become less tolerant to the demands of ethnic groups for rights and recognition (Beck *et al.*, 2002; Pilkington, 2003; Vista, 2007).

With this in mind, we argue that inclusion in a democratic and pluralist society cannot be defined by a national dominant culture. In the UK context, defining Britishness as a set of values and cultural practices that is premised on ‘fairness’ and ‘freedom’ is problematic in that history has shown us that such approaches tend to privilege certain identities and practices over others (Giroux, 1994). Concerns have always existed that British culture is covertly racist in how it understands minority cultures and that it is shaped by dominant notions of empire and white supremacy (Brighton, 2007). As a result, different ethnic and minority groups feel marginalized from the debates about and construction of Britishness (Modood, 2006). As the Parekh Report (Parekh, 2000) suggested:

Britishness, as much as Englishness, has systematic, largely unspoken racial connotations. Whiteness nowhere features as an explicit condition of being British,
but it is widely understood that Englishness, and therefore by extension Britishness, is racially coded. (Parekh, 2000, pp. 38–39)

This historical construction of Britishness can damage the feelings of inclusion for those groups from minority cultures, and hence their commitment to the nation. Parekh (2000) argued that if we are to create an inclusive citizenship, then there is a need to rewrite the ‘national story’ and create a new self-image that is more cosmopolitan and inclusive of diversity. This must also deal with Britain’s imperial past and recognize that it is not conducive to the future (Parekh, 2000). Such a process is not without its difficulties or challenges and the national media were quick to dismiss and marginalize such claims, suggesting that Britishness should not be defined as the problem, when in fact it is the lack of willingness of ethnic minorities to be patriotic. The impact of this type of response is to once again marginalize the voices of the powerless (Fortier, 2005), as those who challenge the dominant culture are seen as part of the ‘problem’.

If we are to create a more inclusive citizenship for different ethnic groups we need to recognize the importance of centralizing culture (Stevenson, 2003) and bringing in the voices of the marginalized in constructing a ‘national identity’ (Modood, 2007). Previous debates have concentrated on social citizenship rights and responsibilities, with recent discussions giving significant weight to the importance of ‘active’ citizenship and citizen responsibilities. However, what is missing in much of this debate is a recognition that cultural rights and opportunities are also fundamental to debates about participation:

To talk of cultural citizenship means that we take questions of rights and responsibilities far beyond the technocratic agendas of mainstream politics and media . . . . In other words, how do questions of entitlement and duty relate to the diversity of culture evident within everyday life, and what is the relationship between an increasingly ‘symbolic’ society and the practice of politics? (Stevenson, 2003, p. 5)

Tackling these issues needs to be at the forefront of policy and practice. Cultural citizenship is about a return to central principles of democratic processes and the importance of the ‘public sphere’. Finding ways into dialogues that are inclusive and encourage the marginalized voices is critical to this process (Stevenson, 2003). Having a ‘non-negotiable’ set of values imposed by others concerning ‘British culture’ or a refusal to recognize the ‘problems’ of this for ‘others’ will not increase social participation and feelings of inclusion amongst different multicultural groups. Being recognized or having your culture recognized as a part of the ‘nation building project is critical to feelings of inclusion’ (Siapera, 2007, p. 8). Ensuring that we have a public debate that is influenced from below and incorporates diversity will increase opportunities for inclusion as well as feelings of belonging (Modood, 2007).

Youth Culture, Multiculturalism and Citizenship

In these debates over cultural citizenship and multiculturalism it is important that young people’s voices are not marginalized, as they have traditionally been in debates over citizenship (Smith et al., 2005). Discussions about what it means to be a young citizen has been dominated from above (Tisdall et al., 2006). Similarly, inclusion of cultural identities
of the young and especially different ethnic groups has also traditionally been marginalized (Blackman & France, 2001). Meeting the cultural needs of young people from different ethnic backgrounds is critical if participation and active involvement in citizenship is to be increased. For example, young people from a Pakistani background highlighted the problems they encountered when going to university. Not only did the drinking culture of these institutions lead to ethnic segregation, but also their choice of university was shaped by their cultural responsibilities to family life. The cultural expectation of young Pakistani women, for example, was for them to have a major caring role in the home. This could limit their participation in higher education and shape their choices of university (Cassidy et al., 2006). Similar issues exist for young Chinese people leaving home in that they could feel isolated, believing that independence was difficult to achieve because they felt ‘different’. Choices of when and how to leave home were then shaped by their ability to maintain links to their family and cultural heritage (Cassidy et al., 2006). Issues of recognition of culture within education also remain critical for feelings of belonging. If young people cannot recognize themselves and their culture in the national curriculum, this can also create problems (Tikly et al., 2006). For example, an evaluation of the Aiming Higher programme suggests that there remain serious problems with the school curriculum, in as much as it is being delivered from a white or Eurocentric Christian standpoint, leaving many groups of ethnic minority youth alienated and feeling that their cultural needs are not recognized. Again, a more inclusive citizenship for different ethnic groups would give a stronger recognition to diverse cultural needs.

However, youth culture is also an important site where young people participate. In their cultural activities and participation they can construct and influence the world around them (Willis, 1990). This tends to take place more at the local level and can be distinctive from adult cultures and ways of being (Bennett, 2005). It can also be fragmented and diverse, emerging from creative sources of social and political interactions of the young (Willis, 1990). Notions of multiculturalism and citizenship show little acknowledgement or recognition of the role of youth culture. In fact, when youth culture is discussed or brought into these debates it is usually seen as negative and a ‘problem’. For example, the growth of a risk-taking culture or the sub-cultural activities of working class young men in high crime areas tend to locate the problem as dysfunctional ‘cultural’ practice (France, 2007).

For multicultural groups youth culture is usually seen as even more problematic. Historically, black culture has always been problematized and seen as ‘dangerous’. Hall et al. (1978) showed how the ‘black mugger’ was constructed by the state and media as a threat to personal street safety. More recently, attention has shifted towards young black men and ‘gang culture’ and in particular in relation to ‘gangster’ lifestyles and gun crime, especially in deprived communities. Attention has recently focused on Asian and Muslim youth and their cultural activities. There has been growing anxiety about Asian gangs, although its existence has been questioned as being little more than a myth that is used symbolically as a ‘folk devil’ (Alexander, 2004). Attention to these questions by the state is leading to a criminalization of Asian youth culture, where they are constructed as the ‘other’ and as a threat to stable order. In this context they are being used to define and demonize the Asian way of life (Goodey, 2001).

What political and media discourses fail to engage with is the more creative aspects of youth culture and the contributions that youth culture can make to debates on multicultural Britain. Neither is it recognized that young people draw upon and use their own culture as a site and form of expression and, therefore, create an opportunity to use this medium
to express themselves in debates about ‘Britishness’. Black culture in the dance and music industry has made a massive impact on contemporary British culture (Carrington & Wilson, 2005). Not only has this a long and illustrious history, but in more recent times its relationship with the new forms of music (hip hop, house and rap) has brought a whole new meaning to youth culture. Modern day music cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the contribution black and ethnic music has made to the industry (Carrington & Wilson, 2005). Black music can also be highly politicized and can challenge economic exclusion and racism, yet, as Gilroy (2002) highlighted, this tends to get commodified, as it is:

annexed by corporate power exported around the globe without anyone associated with either politics or government being able to appreciate their worth as political and economic assets. (p. xxix).

This being said, there has been growing anxiety about the negative role of black music, with it being seen as endorsing ‘gang’ and gun culture due to the fact that a number of prominent black rap singers and stars seem to perpetuate negative stereotypes, antisocial behaviour and homophobic views. Such a position has been defended by ‘gangster rappers’, suggesting they are reflecting ‘real’ life on the streets and, therefore, it is not about perpetuating a way of life but describing it. Bennett (2000) argued that while much of ‘gangster rap’ and hip hop is seen as negative, it takes a different role at more local levels. In his study of rap in Newcastle in the UK and Frankfurt in Germany he was able to show how the music activities of rappers was not only shaped by the local context but also helped them construct their identities and shape the local music scene. In this context it had a significant (and positive) role to play in terms of inclusion (Bennett, 2000).

Bhangra music has had a similar role to play for young British Asian youth. Bhangra has a long history, but it is associated with the synthesis of eastern traditional music with western contemporary music forms (Bennett, 2000), and while it has major global popularity it remains fundamentally Asian in its appeal. It helps forge ‘new’ Asian identities in the UK and brings about cross-cultural alliances that challenge racism. Asian youth use Bhangra as a means of breaking away from their traditional parent cultures and constructing a new contemporary view of what being Asian means. This is appealing to a wider audience and can challenge racial stereotypes of what it means to be Asian (Bennett, 2000).

In these examples what we see is youth culture not only being a creative and contributory force for change but also creating global and transnational communities that they feel a part of. Youth culture can, therefore, be an important site where the young not only voice their views and concerns but also shape the world around them. Youth culture in post-modern times is usually constructed as ‘depthless’, being hedonistic and without meaning (Redhead, 1993) or as antisocial and problematic. Yet in reality it can have political significance, being an important site for young people to voice their concerns while also having a critical role to play not only in forging new identities and opportunities, but also finding new ways of challenging structural and cultural inequalities (Blackman & France, 2001). Youth culture, therefore, can have an important role in the way that young people not only live out their everyday citizenship, but also how they might contribute to future forms of national and global citizenship.
The ‘Unjust’ State and Feelings of Inclusion

However, debates over multiculturalism, citizenship, youth and inclusion cannot be divorced from wider economic and structural factors. While recognizing the importance of culture and cultural practice as a central component of citizenship, we should not ignore the critical role that disadvantage and the lack of economic resources can have on cultural and social participation and feelings of belonging (Byrne, 2005). These are critical questions and are linked to the importance of justice or a ‘just state’ in dealing with belonging (Cortina, 1997). Recognition and acknowledgement of the levels of inequality among different ethnic groups is critical to understanding their experiences of citizenship (Pilkington, 2003).

The argument for a ‘just state’ underlies the assumption that citizens who share the same space need to be given similar rights and responsibilities and to be treated with equal importance, despite their ethnic or racial origin. In its ideal form a socially just state would incorporate in its fundamental rights not only basic human rights, but also a wide range of economic, social and cultural rights that would enhance and increase social participation by all. Thus, a just state should, at the very least, offer equal access to basic services and opportunities for all its members while also dealing with injustices when unequal access continues to shape the life chances of the most marginal.

In the UK feelings of belonging are greatly influenced by how different ethnic groups experience services and opportunities. For example, new immigrants to the UK expressed more positive feelings of belonging when they had good housing and access to local services and support mechanisms (Ameli et al., 2004). However, Muslim youth expressed feelings of exclusion in terms of how their religion was represented and supported within the UK. In a recent poll 58% of young Muslim men felt that extreme religious persecution was very or fairly likely and 54% thought more needed to be done to accommodate their religion (National Opinion Polls, 2007). Young Muslims felt that they were not being listened to or that their religious needs were being ignored in debates about ‘Britishness’ and policies of inclusion. These issues were further compounded by the actions of the British state in its lack of support for the Islamic religion across the globe. A lack of response to the persecution of Muslims in Bosnia and Russia created feelings amongst young Muslim men that their religious beliefs were marginal to the interests of British foreign policy (Brighton, 2007). These feelings are enhanced by the British position in Iraq, leaving young Muslims feeling alienated from belonging to Britain (Brighton, 2007). Young Muslims may feel closer to and a stronger sense of belonging to Muslim communities throughout the world (The 1990 Trust, 2006; Mirza et al., 2007). For Black and Asian youth their feelings of inclusion in society are affected by their experiences of the police (Smith & Gray, 1985). Evidence shows that young black males are more likely to be stopped and searched on the streets compared with their white counterparts (Bowling & Phillips, 2002). More recently this has extended to Asian youth, with a fear of terrorism being seen as the cause. As a result, young people from black and Asian communities have negative views of the police and perceive that they are being treated unfairly (Smith, 1997).

Levels of inequality among different ethnic groups are also critical to how young people from ethnic groups experience the UK and citizenship (Platt, 2007). The consequences of poverty for life chances are well documented in that it limits participation in a wide range of social and economic opportunities throughout the course of life (Pantazis et al., 2006). Young people from ethnic minorities are often excluded from resources and opportunities,
with certain ethnic groups faring worse than others. For example, the Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnic groups have the highest levels of poverty in the UK (Platt, 2007). Similar patterns exist in terms of educational opportunities, unemployment rates and involvement in higher education. For example, ethnic minority groups have particular problems within the selective educational system (Tomlinson, 2005). Not only are they less likely to have access to the best schools but Afro-Caribbean young men are four times more likely to be excluded from school than white young people, and truancy levels are highest amongst Afro-Caribbean men (Tomlinson, 2005). As a result of these problems a high proportion of ethnic minority groups underachieve at GCSE and A-level (Tomlinson, 2005). These patterns are also transferable to higher education settings in that it is ethnic minorities who fare worse in terms of getting into university, with those that do more likely to attend post-1992 universities (Connor et al., 2004). Similar experiences exist in the field of employment, in that ethnic groups experience the highest rates of unemployment, with Pakistani and Bangladeshi youth more likely to be unemployed than any other group (Clegg & Barrow, 2004). In these contexts large sections of the ethnic minority populations of the UK are excluded from many of the basic necessities of life and from many of the opportunities and benefits that being a part of British society should bring. Such exclusion impacts not only on feelings of inclusion, but also on feelings of belonging, citizenship and ‘Britishness’.

Conclusion: A Future Policy Agenda for Multicultural Youth and Citizenship

In order to combat the social exclusion of different cultural youth groups policymakers need to engage with the question on a different level. In recent debates policy-making has been driven by a ‘scaremongering press’ who see policies that advocate multiculturalism as detrimental to the ‘British way of life’ (Pilkington, 2003; Brighton, 2007). Not only has this further problematized multiculturalism, it has also conflated a wide range of issues into one. Immigration, terrorism and integration have all been linked together under the title ‘multiculturalism’, and this has been constructed as a ‘single problem’, with the blame being shifted to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in society. Rejection of the Parekh (2000) recommendations and installation of a strategy that emphasizes ‘community cohesion’ has had a detrimental impact on the success of government in tackling the fundamental problems affecting young ethnic minorities’ feelings of belonging and social participation. Policies and practices that are ‘top-down’ and require ‘assimilation’ of Britishness and British values are marginalizing many groups of ethnic minority young people. Lack of attention to their cultural needs and ‘problematizing’ their youth culture is creating negative feelings in those who need to engage in the construction of a British identity. Also, unequal access to education and employment opportunities, as well as perceived injustices both globally and domestically towards Muslims, is creating feelings of disillusionment and cynicism about the rights supposedly inherent in being a British citizen.

As Lister suggested, a more inclusive citizenship needs to be just, give recognition, allow self-determination and promote solidarity (Lister, 2007b). For this to be achieved we need to address three core issues for ethnic minority youths. First, there needs to be a strong recognition of cultural rights in the concept of citizenship (Stevenson, 2003). Participation and active citizenship are greatly affected by the cultural context of social participation and it can shape the choices young people make and the opportunities they have to be ‘good’
citizens. Policies on citizenship need to recognize young people’s own cultural practices, recognizing such practices as a site for potential positive participation and one that is important to how young people are active in citizenship of the ‘everyday’. Having policies that bring cultural diversity to the attention of others or give recognition in the school curriculum to the history and culture of different groups is valuable. The recent policy attempt (DfES, 2007) to embed this within the curriculum is important, yet more needs to be done to ensure that cultural rights are enshrined in policy and practice.

A second and related issue is how policy and practice actively engage with different ethnic minority young people and how we encourage feelings of inclusion and citizenship. If we are to construct a more dynamic and active form of citizenship then we need to find creative ways of engaging young people in the construction of Britishness and of policies and practices to improve their inclusion. Recent youth policies have made this a priority (HM Treasury & Department for Children, Schools & Families, 2007), suggesting that involvement in decision-making processes are critical and make for more successful policies and practices at the local level. Again, such a step forward is important, yet real challenges remain, in that engaging some of the most disaffected and ‘problematised’ groups of young people requires substantial resources and activity (Percy-Smith, 2006). In order to engage with such disaffected groups practitioners will need to find ways of ensuring that diversity and difference are represented. Such issues are clearly challenging, as was discovered by an evaluation of the UK Youth Parliament, which highlighted the limited involvement of ethnic minorities (DfES, 2004), and will require more grounded ways of generating real participation in decision-making (Percy-Smith, 2006).

Third, and finally, while youth policy has been active in constructing young people’s citizenship, core attention has been given to responsibilizing the young as ‘active citizens’ (France, 2007). Economic and social policies have concentrated on getting young people into work or training and ensuring they have vocational skills for the demands of the British economy (France, 2007). These policies have varied in their effectiveness, as economic and social policies have tended not to benefit Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Afro-Caribbean and other ethnic groups. Educational opportunities, employment and training all see ethnic minorities as ‘bottom of the pile’ when it comes to opportunities. Such a situation needs to be addressed by policy, otherwise disaffection will continue to increase amongst minority ethnic groups. As Fraser (2003) argued, if justice is to be done and inclusion is to be increased there needs to be a greater parity in how material resources are redistributed, ensuring that those who are less well-off see positive gains from being members of British society.

Inclusive citizenship will only be achieved for young people from ethnic minorities if their participation in cultural activities is recognized and understood; if inequalities in access to resources and services are removed and if these young people are given a voice in the development of policies which affect them.

References


