'On the Buses: Acceptance, Ambition & Assimilation. The Employment History of Newcastle-upon-Tyne's Muslim Immigrants, 1960s-1990s'

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Today, there is no denying that Muslim immigration has a fixed place at the centre of Europe's political agenda. Since the beginning of the 1990s, Europe has witnessed France's headscarf affair, the rise of the National Front, and the Madrid bombings. These have been joined by Denmark's cartoon scandal, the murders of a Dutch anti-immigration politician and a filmmaker who criticised Islam's attitude towards women, and the coming to power of Haider's far-right party in Austria. Britain alone has been the home of the Rushdie affair, debates on single faith schools, and suffered the consequences of home-grown Islamic fundamentalist terrorists during the London bombings of July 2005. These events have resulted in a bountiful literature that uses such terms as "European immigration", "European Islam", and "European Muslims".[1] Anna Traindafyllidou, Tariq Modood and Ricard Zapata-Barrero refer to a crisis of European multiculturalism that has been the result of European citizenship being disorientated, 'increasingly linking a religion (Islam) with violence and anti-Western values.'[2] Even during the early 1990s, there appears to have been strong claims of a division between Islam and the "Christian West". As Steven Vertovec and Ceri Peach point out, a good depiction of this was the June 1992 issue of *Time* magazine that pictured an automatic weapon and a slogan that read 'Islam: Should the World be Afraid?'.[3] On the whole, scholars have increasingly employed terms such as ''Islamic revolution' and 'clash of civilizations'.[4]

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[1] See T. Gerholm and Y. Lithman, *The New Islamic Presence in Western Europe* (London, 1988), B. Lewis and D. Schnapper, *Muslims in Europe* (London, 1994) and N. AlSayyad and M. Castells, *Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam. Politics, Culture, and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization* (Oxford, 2002).

[2] A. Triandafyllidou, T. Modood and R. Zapata-Barrero, 'European Challenges to Multicultural Citizenship. Muslims, Secularism and Beyond', in A. Triandafyllidou, T. Modood and R. Zapata-Barrero (eds.), *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship. A European Approach* (London, 2006), p. 1.

[3] S. Vertovec and C. Peach, *Islam in Europe. The Politics of Religion and Community* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 4.

[4] See S. Abedin and Z. Sardar, *Muslim Minorities in the West* (London, 1995), p. 2 and J. Nielsen, *Towards a European Islam* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 129.

This paper will seek to go beyond these historiographically insistent claims and will assert that the relationship between Britain and Muslim immigration has not always necessarily been one of inevitable conflict. It will draw upon the post-1960s Muslim immigrant community of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and, in doing so, will provide a voice to those beyond the foci of Bradford, Birmingham and Leicester who, despite belonging to both a well-established and growing ethnic community, have remained relatively silent in the historiography.[5] It will assess the performance of these Muslim immigrants within the local employment sector and will contest claims of unemployment, low wages and a concentration in unskilled jobs, characteristics that are increasingly cited by scholars and tend to dominate the literature.[6] Furthermore, studies have tended to focus on the attainment of financial capital as the prime determinant of an individual's economic success.[7] When assessing Britain's post-war Muslim immigrant community, however, there are further factors that one must consider, such as the opportunities immigrants were offered, the extent to which the second generation either adhered to or deviated away from the employment patterns of their parents, the distribution of Muslim immigrants amongst the varying economic sectors, and the level of entrepreneurship.

Britain has experienced massive immigration during the post-war era. Her role as the imperial hub for a quarter of the world's surface has led to the creation of the socioeconomic and cultural entity of the Commonwealth. Depending on pre-existing links and bonds, Muslim immigrants arrived to Britain as ex-subjects of the imperial project. As Christian Joppke highlights, at the end of the Second World War, there were 800 million people living in countries that constituted 25% of the globe's land surface who were entitled to claim right of settlement in Britain.[8] Zig Layton-Henry points out how, as subjects of the British Empire, these immigrants not only had the right to enter Britain, but

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[5] For the few exceptions, see J. Davies and J. Taylor, 'Race. Community and No Conflict', *New Society* (1970), pp. 67-9, J. Davies, *The Evangelistic Bureaucrat. A Study of a Planning Exercise in Newcastle-upon-Tyne* (London, 1972), J. Taylor, *The Half-way Generation. A Study of Asian Youths in Newcastle-upon-Tyne* (Windsor, 1976) and J. Davies, *Asian Housing in Britain* (London, 1985).

[6] See J. Rex and S. Tomlinson, *Colonial Immigrants in a British City: A Class Analysis* (London, 1979), D. Leslie, J. Lindley and L. Thomas, 'Decline and Fall: Unemployment among Britain's Non-White Ethnic Communities 1960-1999', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 164 (2001), pp. 371-87 and M. Shields and A. Wailoo, 'Exploring the Determinants of Unhappiness for Ethnic Minority Men in Britain', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 49 (2002), pp. 445-66.

[7] See B. Chiswick, 'The Earnings of White and Coloured Male Immigrants in Britain', *Economica* 47 (1980), pp. 81-7 and D. Blackaby, K. Clark, D. Leslie and P. Murphy, 'Black-White Male Earnings and Employment Prospects in the 1970s and 1980s: Evidence for Britain', *Economic Letters* 46 (1994), pp. 273–80.

[8] C. Joppke, 'Multiculturalism and Immigration: A Comparison of the United States, Germany, and Great Britain', *Theory and Society* 25 (1996), p. 477.

also the right to British citizenship, they were entitled to vote, work in the civil service and serve in the British armed forces.[9] Adrian Favell highlights that many of the early immigrants who arrived to Britain during the 1940s and 1950s had experienced the British education system, were familiar with British culture and, therefore, many regarded Britain as a natural second home.[10] Joanna Herbert's recent study on the South Asian community in Leicester reinforced this notion that colonial ties played a large role in initial reasons for migrating to Britain and in the expectations immigrants themselves had upon arrival.[11]

It has undeniably been Commonwealth immigration that has shaped Britain into the multicultural society it is today. Despite immigration controls, the fear that often arrived with coloured Commonwealth immigrants, anti-immigrant politicians such as Thatcher, extremists such as Powell and the uncertainty concerning British citizenship, Muslim immigrants primarily from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have been settling in and establishing their own communities in Britain for the last fifty years. It has been Britain's colonial history that gave way to an immigration pattern in which migrants arrived independently with social and economic aspirations. It is the acknowledgement of this history that teases out the holistic relationship between Britain and the Muslim world.

Contrary to much of the historiography, Newcastle's immigrants initially had similar employment opportunities to the indigenous population.[12] During the 1960s, male Asian youths in Newcastle endured low unemployment levels and successfully attained apprenticeships, skilled and semi-skilled work, and competitive wages. Two mid-1960s studies established that many of Newcastle's first-generation Muslim immigrants were concentrated in two types of employment, either in the public transport sector as bus drivers and conductors, or as self-employed shop-keepers, peddlers and tailors.[13] The notion that many of Newcastle's Muslim immigrants became concentrated in the transport industry is supported by the city council's 1981 Black Business Development Project, which states that Tyne & Wear Passenger Transport Executive employed a substantial

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[9] Z. Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration: Immigration, 'Race' and 'Race' Relations in Post-war Britain* (Oxford, 1992), p. 9.

[10] A. Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 103.

[11] J. Herbert, *Negotiating Boundaries in the City: Migration, Ethnicity, and Gender in Britain* (Aldershot, 2008).

[12] See B. Hepple, *Race, Jobs and the Law in Britain* (London, 1968) and D. Smith, *Racial Disadvantage in Britain* (Harmondsworth, 1977).

[13] See Taylor, *The Half-way Generation* and Davies, *The Evangelistic Bureaucrat*.

number of Newcastle's ethnic minorities.[14] This relatively successful economic position of Newcastle's immigrants becomes apparent when comparing their position to Sheila Allen, Stuart Bentley and Joanna Bornat's Indian and Pakistani respondents in Bradford, for example, a large percentage of whom worked as replacement labour in the textile industry, or to Birmingham's West Indian immigrants, many of whom Lydia Lindsey argues were nothing more than marginal workers who completed "dirty" jobs.[15]

As stressed in numerous Newcastle City Council reports that emerged during the 1980s, it was the pursuit for self-employment that soon dominated the position of Newcastle's Muslim immigrants within the local employment sector The majority arrived with few economic resources and depended largely on contacts within their own communities. Indian and Pakistani immigrants tended to establish retail outlets. Some worked in the drapery trade and, initially, contacts would be used to sell draperies door-to-door and, once enough money had been saved, the salesmen would open market stalls and, eventually, small shops. The Bangladeshis often sought employment in local restaurants. They started out as kitchen staff until their ability in the English language was fluent enough to be promoted to floor staff. Many of these workers accumulated enough capital and experience to one day run a small take-away of their own and, if this was successful, possibly even a restaurant.[16]

These reports did not mention apprenticeships or second-generation South Asian immigrants deviating away from the employment patterns of their parents. Instead, the exact opposite seemed to be occurring in that the choices made by the second generation were simply adhering to those of the first in the form of small businesses. Firstly, this might have been due to the North East of England's economic structural change of the 1970s and 1980s. With the closure of the dockyards, the steelworks and the coal mines, many skilled and unskilled manual workers found themselves out of work, potentially causing many second-generation Asians to revert back to the employment patterns of their parents. Secondly, the historiography suggests that Muslim immigrants might have chosen to

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[14] Local Government and Racial Equality Sub-Committee of Corporate Joint Sub-Committee, 18 March 1983-17 July 1985, Black Business Development Project,1981, MD.NC/162/1 , p. 22.

[15] S. Allen, S. Bentley and J. Bornat, *Work, Race and Immigration* (Bradford, 1977), pp. 59-61 and L. Lindsey, 'The Split-Labour Phenomenon: Its Impact on West Indian Workers as a Marginal Working Class in Birmingham, England, 1948-1962', *The Journal of Negro History* 78 (1993), pp. 124-45.

[16] See Black Business Development Project, 1981, MD.NC/162/1, p. 22 and Local Government & Racial Equality Sub-Committee of Corporate Joint Sub-Committee, 18 September 1985-15 July 1987, City of Newcastle-upon-Tyne Economic Development Committee, Ethnic Minority Groups & Business Development, 4 March 1985, MD.NC/162/2, Tyne & Wear Archives Service.

establish, run or work in small ethnic minority businesses due to racial prejudice, and in order to avoid unemployment.[17] A third possible reason for why Newcastle's Muslim immigrants had, by the early 1980s, opted for self-employment might have been the nature of the immigrants themselves, with much of the literature stressing the link between ethnic minorities and entrepreneurship both within and beyond Britain and the rest of Europe, whether it be Taiwanese immigrants in Canada or Chinese immigrants in Italy.[18]

Despite this ambition to be self-employed, few Muslim immigrants in Newcastle had any previous experience in business. As is highlighted by the Black Business Development Project, business ventures were mostly undertaken solely on the basis of personal judgement, rather than on planned projections of likely income and a thorough investigation of financial and other assistance available.[19] Newcastle's Muslim immigrant businessmen have never needed to adhere to the business etiquette consisting of projections of planned income or assistance from a business development agency because they have historically sought advice from within their own communities and have used past successful business experiences as models.[20]

Needless to say, this approach had disadvantages. A saturation point could be reached when it was no longer financially viable to open another take-away or corner shop in a given area, or the investment of resources may not always be used to the optimum efficiency. However, this trait of not seeking assistance from outside the immigrant community is by no means particular to Newcastle. Allen, Bentley and Bornat found that, amongst their Indian and Pakistani respondents in Bradford, 'sources of finance and sites for businesses in many cases are provided entirely from within the community and

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[17] See T. Jones, D. McEvoy and G. Barratt, 'Labour Intensive Practices in the Ethnic Minority Firm', in J. Atkinson and D. Storey (eds.), *Employment, the Small Firm and the Labour Market* (London, 1994), pp. 172-205. Some more recent studies have disagreed that immigrants in Britain may have opted for self-employment in order to shield themselves from unemployment and discrimination. See A. Basu, 'An Explanation of Entrepreneurial Activity among Asian Small Businesses in Britain', *Small Business Economics* 10 (1998), pp. 313-26.

[18] See L. Wong, 'Taiwanese Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Canada and Transnational Social Space', *International Migration* 42 (2004), pp. 113–52 and A. Ceccagno, 'New Chinese Migrants in Italy', *International Migration* 41 (2003), pp. 187–213. See also M. Ram, D. Smallbone, D. Deakins and T. Jones, 'Banking on 'Break Out': Finance and Development of Ethnic Minority Business', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 29 (2003), pp. 663-81, N. Fertala, 'A Study of Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Upper Bavaria', *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* 4 (2006), pp. 179-206, R. Waldinger, *Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Immigrant Businesses in Industrial Societies* (Newbury Park, 1990) and K. Rušinović, *Dynamic Entrepreneurship: First and Second-Generation Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Dutch Cities* (Amsterdam, 2006).

[19] Black Business Development Project, 1981, MD.NC/162/1, p. 23.

[20] Ibid., p. 23.

independent of any white resources.[21] It cannot be said, however, that there was not assistance available to Newcastle's Muslim immigrant businessmen as the city hosted numerous small firm advisory services. However, very few ethnic minority members approached these services seeking advice. Various attempts were made by Newcastle's local authority to assist immigrants with the foundation of small businesses. There were seminars and courses in which the financial and other types of aid available to them were discussed. On the whole, however, these were poorly attended.[22]

In 1997, Newcastle City Council compiled a survey that was to be completed by the owners of Newcastle's ethnic minority businesses. The survey was sent to 465 businesses and was completed by 96% of them. Some of the results are as follows: 85% of the businesses had not had any form of business training, only 35% expressed an interest in taking part in a business support network, 62% operated as sole traders, 18% were dissatisfied with their locations, 22% were affected by crime and 17% by racial harassment.[23] What immediately becomes apparent is that, although the majority of businesses had not received any type of business training, only about a third of them were interested in joining a support network. Their desire for independence is further enhanced by the fact that, in most cases, assistance is rejected, despite racial harassment and crime not being uncommon.

As well as succeeding in attaining the long sought-after goal of economic independence, Newcastle's Muslim immigrant population has benefited from an Anglo-Asian cultural osmosis where influences have been mixed to create an Asian-inspired and English-influenced saleable product. An example of this Anglo-Asian cultural osmosis is the Birmingham-created Balti "curry", a dish served in Indian and Pakistani restaurants that has been invented purely for the British customer. The success of this dish across Britain becomes especially apparent when compared to that of other European Muslim immigrant communities. The *döner kebab*, for example, a food that has been referred to as a 'made in Germany "Turkish speciality"',[24] has arguably been the "creation" of an immigrant community in comparably far less favourable circumstances, with the literature suggesting that many kebab stands might have initially sprung up around the Kreuzberg district of

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[21] Allen, Bentley and Bornat, *Work, Race and Immigration*, p. 247.
[22] Black Business Development Project, 1981, MD.NC/162/1, p. 24.
[23] See Minority Ethnic Businesses in Newcastle. Report of Survey Undertaken by Chief Executive's Department Newcastle City Council 1997, MD.NC/614/2, Tyne & Wear Archives Service.
[24] See J. Mushaben, 'Thinking Globally, Interacting Locally: Gender, Entrepreneurship and Urban Citizenship in Germany', *Citizenship Studies* 10 (2006), p. 215.

Berlin during the early to mid-1970s merely because of job losses following the oil crisis. It has been argued that partaking in such business ventures was no more than the more welcome alternative to returning to Turkey and that many Turkish immigrants have since been forced to diversify into other sectors, believing that a German host society's cultural repulsion of Turkish foodstuffs was becoming increasingly widespread.[25] In Newcastle, however, as throughout Britain, whether opening a small corner-shop or an Indian take-away, the Muslim immigrant businessman has created a saleable product from a merger of indigenous and ethnic cultures and influences within the existing framework of small British retail. Cultural assimilation has enabled Muslim immigrants to create and thrive in their own economic niche.

If it is assumed that economic integration takes place only when ethnic workers are dispersed throughout the employment sector, vertically and horizontally, one would have to conclude that the preponderance of ethnic minority businesses in Newcastle has historically signified a lack of economic integration and perhaps a breach between the Muslim immigrant community and its adopted indigenous society. Newcastle's Muslim immigrants is not distributed throughout the local economy or its various facets. Instead, although there is a scattering of Muslim immigrant businesses throughout Newcastle's central business district, the main concentration is located in the city's West End. However, it could be suggested that this uneven distribution of ethnic minority businesses to the West End was not due so much to a lack of economic integration or merely the result of this quarter housing a large percentage of the city's immigrants, but was also a reaction to market forces. It is the West End with its burgeoning student and white working class population that often forms the foundation for Indian take-aways and Pakistani corner-shops. This demonstrates an entrepreneurial spirit amongst ethnic minorities, which has sometimes been misunderstood amongst historians.[26] It has often been the subtle entities of family and friendship ties embodied by a moral-cultural economy of obligation amongst immigrants, rather than the initiatives of the council and local opportunities, which have defined the world of the ethnic minority businessman.

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[25] See Zentrum für Türkeistudien, *Die ökonomische Dimension der türkischen Selbstständigen in Deutschland und der Europäischen Union* (Essen, 2001), p. 117 and R. Boyes and D. Huneke, *Is it Easier to be a Turk in Berlin or a Pakistani in Bradford?* (London, 2004), p. 21.

[26] See Aldrich, Cater, Jones and McEvoy, 'Business Development and Self-Segregation', Allen, Bentley and Bornat, *Work, Race and Immigration* and J. Cater, T. Jones and D. McEvoy, *The Institutional Ghetto: The Case of Asians in Bradford*, Unpublished Paper Delivered to the Institute of British Geographers Annual Conference (Hull, 1978).

There is no doubt that a certain level of economic integration is attainable. At some stage, Newcastle witnessed Muslim immigrants working alongside members of the indigenous population either as bus drivers or conductors. However, what has emerged is that perhaps not economic integration, but rather economic independence, has been their long-term goal. Rather than arguing that their behaviour towards the labour market has been dictated by constraint, Newcastle's Muslim immigrants have prevailed both in competing with members of the indigenous population and, more importantly, in manipulating the employment sector to suit their long-term needs. What has emerged is a Muslim immigrant community that has succeeded in achieving a long sought-after economic independence in the form of small businesses as a result of a cultural, social and economic interaction with the local indigenous population. Like those in London, Birmingham, Bradford and Leicester, Newcastle's Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants have traditionally chosen self-employment when possible and have relied, in most cases, solely on members of their own communities in doing so.[27] Their economic success despite largely opting for the most difficult path is evidence of their economic integration within and their good relations with their local host society.

By assessing the performance of Newcastle's Muslim immigrants within the local employment sector, this paper highlights not only their elasticity to adapt to the needs of the host society, but also the fundamental historiographical and political search for conflict when there may be little. Although there is no doubt that in recent decades Islam and immigration have consistently been at the forefront of the British political agenda, it is essential to realise that, at a grassroots level, positive relations have been frequent. Daily life appears to have continued within Newcastle's Muslim immigrant community almost in willing ignorance of the policy debates and fraught deliberations of Westminster. Newcastle's Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants have historically succeeded in attaining a long sought-after economic independence and, in many cases, they initially immersed themselves into the local labour market alongside their indigenous counterparts to acquire the necessary financial capital to do so.

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[27] See H. Aldrich, J. Cater, T. Jones and D. McEvoy, 'Business Development and Self-Segregation: Asian Enterprise in Three British Cities', in C. Peach, V. Robinson and S. Smith (eds.), *Ethnic Segregation in Cities* (Athens, GA, 1981), pp. 170-90 and M. Ram, B. Sanghera, T. Abbas, G. Barlow and T. Jones, 'Ethnic Minority Business in Comparative Perspective: The Case of the Independent Restaurant Sector', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 26 (2000), pp. 495-510.

There is little doubt that Newcastle's Muslim immigrant community is succeeding as a result of its own self-determination, but also due to a certain understanding of and contact with its local host society. Muslim immigrants have often been described as a 'problem case' on Europe's multiculturalist agenda, with many scholars incorrectly assuming that because the debate on Islam is both ongoing and increasingly heated, Muslim immigrant communities are failing at achieving integration.[28] Yet as has been seen regarding Newcastle's Muslim immigrant community, the economic independence striven for is neither a consequence of Islam, nor is it an indicator of non-integration. It appears as though acceptance, ambition and assimilation have defined the world of Newcastle's Muslim immigrant businessman.

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[28] See B. Parekh, 'Europe, Liberalism and the "Muslim Question"', in Modood, Triandafyllidou and Barrero, *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship*, p. 179 and Triandafyllidou, Modood and Zapata-Barrero, 'European Challenges to Multicultural Citizenship', pp. 3-10.