

**The struggle to belong**  
*Dealing with diversity in 21<sup>st</sup> century urban settings*

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**Claiming Spaces: British Muslim negotiations of urban citizenship in  
an era of new migration**

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## **Introduction**

New streams of immigration and settlement in twenty-first century Britain have generated wide ranging political and scholarly debate about the social and economic impact of newcomers and the challenges of accommodating social, cultural and religious diversity at a range of nested scales. Although ongoing debates about immigration and its potential consequences play a central role in national imaginings of British identity, integrity and national security, the impact of new migration on the everyday lives of British citizens is remarkably uneven. Even though recent labour migrations, particularly from Eastern Europe, have opened up new and wider geographies of encounter with difference than in previous decades, the challenges of negotiating new diversity and confronting ethnic difference on an everyday basis are still relatively localised (Robinson 2010). Accounts of social tensions and competition for neighbourhood resources, as well as newly emerging intercultural associations, indicate that those living in the more deprived inner-city areas of immigration, including members of settled minority ethnic groups, are most likely to be at the forefront of this social and spatial change (Amas and Crosland 2006). The day-to-day lives of established residents' living in these localities are thus, to a greater or lesser extent, likely to be bound up with contests over urban citizenship as new migrants' struggle for space, recognition and resources.

This paper interrogates these articulations of citizenship and belonging in the face of rapid change through new migration. Whilst citizenship is most commonly conceptualised in terms of the relationship between citizen and state that is embedded in set of formal rights and obligations, urban theorists have shown growing interest in the city as a social and political space in which citizenship is enacted (Sassen 2000). Cities, argue Isin and Siemiatycki (1999: 7), are 'places where the very meaning, content and extent of citizenship are being made and remade'. Drawing on the notion of citizenship as an array of practices through which individuals and groups claim new rights and/or defend existing ones, these and other authors (e.g. Lepofsky and Fraser 2003; Pine 2010) have conceptualised city spaces such as the urban neighbourhood as places where citizenship is performed. Attention has been drawn to competing claims for rights, recognition and social justice by a range of minority groups (including the homeless, gay men and lesbians, disabled people, minority ethnic groups etc.) that have been

played out across the city in various ways (Isin and Wood 1999). In an era of growing international migration and increasing urban ethnic diversity, everyday negotiations between settled groups and new migrants in the inner areas bring formal constructions of citizenship (as status) and the performative expression of citizenship (as the practice of belonging) clearly to the fore.

Drawing on qualitative research, this paper focuses on negotiations over neighbourhood spaces in the context of new migration from Eastern Europe to Bradford, UK and the challenges this has posed to British Asian Muslims' sense of urban citizenship and belonging. The research focuses on young men and women (20 - 30 years) living in two inner neighbourhoods that have become synonymous with the established British Asian population in the city. The clustering of British Muslims of South Asian heritage in distinctive inner-city community spaces has been well documented, as has the social capital and sense of security derived from them (Phillips et al. 2007; Finney and Simpson 2009). Claims, rooted in the hegemonic 'parallel lives' political discourse of early 2000s, that the persistent segregation of British Muslims signifies their withdrawal from active citizenship and national belonging have been contested (Phillips 2006; Phillips et al. 2007). The resources inherent in community spaces do nevertheless constitute part of an important cultural landscape that British Muslims can lay claim to, and over which they feel they have a measure of authority and control; a cultural space and a safe haven in the face of racialised and religious difference in a political climate that continues to construct this minority ethnic group as 'other'. The arrival of new migrants in such areas can contest prior group claims in ways that may be resolved amicably, meet with resistance or fuel social tensions.

This paper begins by situating the Bradford research in the context of scholarly debates about urban citizenship, drawing particularly on the work of urban and political theorists inspired by Lefebvrian notions of 'rights to the city'. Citizenship is conceptualised as claims making, which is instantiated in the appropriation of neighbourhood spaces (from the street to the community centre), that intersects with emotional encounters with difference in the context of new migration. The research findings underline the salience of the neighbourhood as a site of both citizenship claims and performance for a marginalised group that has struggled to establish their political and social rights as citizens. Whilst British Muslim affiliations and identifications

stretch well beyond the bounded spaces of the inner city, many connect (physically and emotionally) to an imagined community on the ground that coheres in the face of perceived challenges from newcomers. Bradford Muslims' use of neighbourhood resources and accumulation of social capital in these spaces has enabled them to develop a sense of security, to enhance a sense of local belonging and to mobilise and articulate group demands.

In exploring the negotiations over space between the settled British Asian Muslims and new residents of inner Bradford, the argument turns on discursive constructions of sameness and difference as well as embodied acts of hospitality and resistance to the new arrivals. Everyday encounters with new waves of immigrants, the paper argues, prompt established British Muslims to confront their own experience of urban citizenship and, at certain moments, to re-inscribe their sense of belonging in the city. This is underpinned by signs of 'ambivalent national citizenship' that are heightened by their encounters with the Eastern European newcomers, although gendered differences emerge. While young men were likely to exhibit or feel peer pressure to engage in insurgent acts of citizenship (cf. Holston 1998), young women were more likely to adopt a conciliatory approach to resolving perceived differences and to acknowledge more readily the possibilities for community building under the right conditions. Nevertheless, for many, both the uncertainties and vulnerabilities associated with national belonging are thrown into sharp relief by their negotiation over urban space at a time of social transformation.

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