

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN BRITISH SCHOOL; A CASE STUDY ON SHI'ITE STUDENTS IN BIRMINGHAM, UNITED KINGDOM

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ABSTRACT

As a response to the changing composition of society in globalization age, religious education has changed its paradigm to accommodate needs of multicultural society, and it has invited many critics and discussions among scholars. Through the notion of *learning from and learning about religions*, this study intends to portray how identities of Shi'ite students are being constructed in their lifestyle, vision of gender, socialisation, and seeking the coherence of RE with home culture using qualitative approach. The study suggested that through RE Shi'ite students are gradually changing their identity as their achievement identity. They tend to explore more lifestyle with modest modification while keep commit to their value of belief. It shows a small gap between RE tradition at school and students tradition at home in conception, in which they have to be more selective to the contents presented in RE at school before share it with family

Keywords; Religious education, identity formation, learning from, learning about. Shi'ite students

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of religious education, as stated by the QCA (2004), is that it “provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purposes of life, belief about God, the self and natural reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human” (p.7). Thus, RE in this context is not about learning religion as a faith or teaching any faith in particular, but about informing students about their own faith (if they already have one) and other faiths beyond what they know. It also aims to teach students about world reality through different versions of religious principles, so RE is a study of religions, not the study of a religion (Grimmitt, 2000, p.14). The aims of RE in the broad context are to provide opportunities for all children to learn about and from other religions, and

demonstrate the diversity found in English society by examining the similarities and differences in religions, in which students can assess themselves and other people. In number of aspects discussed by the QCA (2004, p.16), RE can also promote learning across the curriculum in spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development, and develop pupils' spirituality (DES, 2004). Such model of religious education could act as a positive cornerstone for the development of a multicultural society.

However, It is not only about the matter of examining differences and similarities, as it will deal with process of cultural shifting. This is because most pupils have engaged with a religion or culture inherited from their parents (Lewis, 2000, p.264; Nesbitt, 1991, p.3). It might be slightly different in a family in which both parents came from different religions or cultural backgrounds, so that the child must decide whether to inherit the father's religion and culture or their mother's, because in some ways the parents might not be able to cultivate their culture and identity and extend them to their children. Caballero et al. (2008, p.30), for example, found that mixed background parents often cope with difficulties in their children's sense of belonging and identity in a variety of ways. As a result, those children who came from mixed religious backgrounds might have a hybrid identity or grow up with identities that they possess from their environment such as family, society, and institutions including schools.

Schools as social institutions play a pivotal role in which cultural, and in some cases religious, values are able to shape children's identities. In school, students will learn about cultures through religion and, vice versa, learn about religions through their cultural enactment (DCSF, 2010). On the other hand, the boundaries of cultural coherence that should be achieved in RE remain unclear and are still being debated. It is uncertain whether RE could achieve identity cohesion or can only lead to role confusion (Erikson, 1963). However, Gross (1987) maintains that if students are being enabled to identify what they have and what they are going to do, this means that they have established their identity. When students are learning about other religions and able to identify the commonalities and differences among religions, they will respect their differences as an inside aspect of belief that could not be influenced by others, and should be respected by others.

2. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Many scholars have been inspired to seek and inquire about the concept of identity. Erikson (1968) in his work considered identity development as one of the important issues in adolescent psychology. Erikson as quoted in Gilliat (1998) defines identity as a psychosocial phenomenon in which the sense of 'me' and 'myself' is constructed in correspondence to others and their responses, and he states that this is not the end of the development process and that at specific stages such as the adolescence phase, there will be a critical points for further development.

However, according to Bosma and Graafsma (1982, p.8), Erikson has not constructed a clear definition of identity; he applied his concept in different ways and focused on different aspects of identity, which has yielded a distorting of the term. Bosma and Graafsma as cited in Gardien, et al. (2006) claim that in Erikson's definition, identity is understood as experience of self-sameness sustainability of one's existence in the time and space and the perception of the fact that others recognize the one's sameness and continuity. Cote and Levine (1987) underlined the fact that clinical and metaphorical description were dominantly found in Eriksson's writings as a basic lack of theoretical precision that looks to pervade his works. In addition, Erikson's theory is being more emphasized in psychoanalytic paradigm, which is an expansion of Freud's theory that mainly stresses the inter-psychological process while considering less the sociological perspective. As a result of this, he used a more holistic view when looking at identity development (Verhofstadt, et al,

1995), so that he paid more attention to how development phases take place. He introduced eight phases of development, in which each phase has a crisis (conflict), and how it influences someone when she/he moves to the next phase.

From the eight phases of development he coined, the most important part in the Erikson's model regarding identity development is the fifth phase, which is considered the adolescence phase of development, and of course this is an important part of identity formation. Erikson (1968) in particularly considered this phase of development as a transitional period to adolescence from childhood. And within this transitional period, identity statuses could be successfully or unsuccessfully developed. The successful identity development can be seen when it brings results on the commitment of a bond. This is not only how young people bind themselves or not, but also how the bonds come about—i.e. whether it comes by exploration or not should be taken into account. In Erikson's model, there are two possibilities for outcomes of the conflict, which are positive outcomes on one side and negative outcomes on the other, and the outcome of identity conflict is identity diffusion. However, according to Waterman (1993), the problem is that Eriksson never defined the range of chronological ages for adolescence periods of life as childhood and adulthood.

Marcia (1980) defines identity as a self-structure and dynamic organization to acquire abilities, beliefs, and personal history. He argued that the more people are aware of their identity, the more they will appear in their uniqueness and sameness to others and better make their way in the world. Marcia's theory is being more operational and seems observable though Marcia's model of identity development was inspired by Erikson's thoughts. Marcia has laid the foundation on which paradigm of identity development becomes more operational in terms of how identity could be constructed (Berzonsky and Adams, 1999). In addition to that, Marcia then set out two main components of identity development—namely *exploration* and *commitment*—to explain a person's status. *Exploration*, according to Grotevant (1987, p.204), is problem-solving behaviour that aims to gain information about someone or about a certain social environment prior to making a life decision. *Commitment*, according to Marcia (1989), is the representation of loyalty of someone to a set of specific goals, values, and beliefs; it is the act of choosing one or more alternatives and following through with them. So here it can be briefly summed up that exploration is a process of sorting through multiple alternatives of life, and commitment is the form of action to make a choice and stay committed within the goals, values, and beliefs that have been determined.

By using these two variables Marcia determined someone's personal status of identity in four categories, namely achieved identity, diffuse identity, moratorium, and foreclosure. Identity achievement means someone has a choice after having made an exploration. Diffused identity means someone has not made an exploration and as such does not have a choice. Moratorium refers to someone who has no choice but has made exploration, and foreclosure means someone has made a choice without doing exploration. These identity statuses can be identified after identifying their commitment and exploration to a particular set of values and beliefs.

In Marcia's view '*commitment* and *exploration*' are two fundamental components. He used these two criteria to describe his model of ideological identities, which are religion and policy. Within this context, *exploration* represents someone making a choice among very meaningful alternatives, and *commitment* in this context is how he/she could have represent specific goals, ideas, and values to which he/she commits. However, the question is whether by determining statuses of a person it could be useful to describe identity development? Many discussions and critics have been drawn to this paradigm. Hoof (1997,1999) highlighted that Marcia tried to find the connection within a

psychoanalytic lens in his notion of identity; meanwhile in the identity statuses, the relationship between the individual and society is very stressed. Hoof added that Marcia's view is unlike Erikson' theory of identity, which is more elaborate on phenomenological and structural aspects, as the significant aspect of Marcia's idea is more stressed on behavioural aspects rather than social aspects. Marcia does not talk about relation or transaction between individuals with the environment, such as pupils with their family/school, which is actually interrelated and mutually influence each other. Bosma (1985) then elaborates and expands Marcia's concept of 'commitment and exploration' into actual commitments and explorations.' Bosma gives more focus to actual commitments and explorations of adolescents in the areas of religion, politics, values, friendship, parents, school, leisure time, and personal qualities (sex, appearance, and personality). Bosma emphasized his concept on the three main aspects, which are degree of contents, degree of commitment, and degree of exploration. This concept seems more practical and covered the psychological and sociological aspects, and it would help us to detect the degree of a pupil's commitment, and exploration to a set of certain goals or ideas by asking them some questions about their life, including church-going, performing *shalat*, or participating in other religious activities. Bosma employed two scales for measuring commitment, which are covered feeling of comfort, support, and direction that a bond/unity was presented and the scale that covered identification in this bond.

Furthermore, In order to see how individuals assembled in a group define themselves whilst in a community with which they associate, in this case their school, fellow students and teachers, it is important to see identity in a socio-cultural domain. According to Tujfel and Turner (1986), we can see identity as a social bound by looking at how people classify themselves using varied categories such as gender, religious affiliation, and organizational background. Categorization is mostly based on the characters or social affiliations of an individual. Turner (1985) stated that the categorization people make is based on the prototypical characteristics of an individual. There are two segments of categorization: specifically in this research is how Shi'ite students in Birmingham view 'their self' and 'others', and how they differ themselves and others in both prototypical characteristics after studying RE lessons. This is obviously not the aim or purposes of RE, but it could be the impact of RE that I would like to identify in this research because they are, as Shi'ite students, a minority group in large multicultural society setting, as Gilliat (1998, p.348) maintains, for minority groups in a multicultural situation, community boundaries become a fundamental aspect to mark group identity. Boundaries that they establish are aimed to clearly define themselves to make clear the characteristics of themselves to the outsiders, and as communal preservation such as religious buildings, street decoration, ethnic shops, and so on. And Shi'ite in this case could be an *ethnic religion* in which, in those communities, religion comprises one of several ethnicity foundations (Duderija, 2008, p.372).

3. METHODS

This research employs qualitative method as it will enable me to explore phenomena that appear using a variety of data resources found during fieldwork, then reveal and understand them through various lenses (Yin, 1984). In this manner I can be more free to explore the issues and phenomena that arise, then look for and seek specific aspects of identity as far as it can benefit the study; as Miles and Huberman (1994, p.10) stated, through qualitative study a researcher can go far beyond answering "what" and "how", or to just "how" and "why" and identify *causality* as it occurs in its real context. To obtain data needed, I used, participant observation, semi- structured interview, and document analysis. The *Participant observation technique* is a technique in which the observer will

attempt to be a kind of observed object in order to understand the real situation in the real world (Robson, 2011). It is aimed to get the native's point of view from a person or observed objects (Malinowski, 1922). In this case, the researcher will act as a student and will follow Religious Education (RE) lessons for several hours based on their class schedules. Semi-structured interview is used to gather detailed information from them in the classroom. The model of interview here will be the focus group interview model in which data will be collected through group interaction based on the topic determined by the researcher (Morgan, 1996, p.130), while document analysis method or content analysis according to Robson (2011) and Potter (1996), could picture, photographs, magazines, etc, and this research in particular will focus on analysing the RE teaching materials, modules, including audio-visual, with their instructions using RE lessons.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The fieldwork research started in July 2012 at a College in Birmingham, United Kingdom which provides adult education for students aged between 16 and 19 years old (A2 level), and based on my observation most of the students in this school are immigrants from Asian countries, the Middle East, and Africa. Besides observing classroom activities and interviewing with an RE teacher and students, collect documentation needed. I also receive the Religious Education Module entitled "Islam: Women and Family Life" and it is designed for level A2 students and it was used in the class I joined. The RE course booklet provided was under the theme "*Women Family and Life*" and presented three main topics to be discussed, namely "*Nature, Purpose and Importance of Family in Islam*", "*Role and Status of Women*" and "*Regulation Concerning Marriage*".

After joining some sessions of religious education class, the teacher was able to create a dynamic, interactive class environment and enjoyable. The themes presented in those three sessions was about women and family life, which covers some current social phenomena in the United Kingdom and in the world at large, such as polygamy, role of women, role of the mother, and Muslim homosexuality in Britain. The teacher usually starts the lesson by asking students two or three questions in the beginning to brainstorm and contemplate while consulting the reading material that has already been prepared. After that, the teacher will explore students' understanding, opinions, or comments about the topics, then the teacher will support the topic with some video clips or pictures to provoke students' opinions.

The RE teacher interviewed explain that, "the curriculum or syllabus just tells what to teach and not how to teach. We have to provide better and modern teaching methodology rather than traditional ways of teaching when presenting all topics suggested in the syllabus and curriculum, because the teaching methods and the syllabus are controlled by OFSTED¹". The consequence is that government will downgrade the school if OFSTED found that the lesson and the methods of teaching here are still using traditional."

Most of the topics presented in the class are challenged topics that have potential to provoke students' arguments or curiosity as they seems controversial within Islamic views by looking at how Islamic scholars or how the Qur'an and Hadits explains the phenomena. However, according to the teacher, the most challenged topics that sometimes raise controversy and debate from and among the students is when talking about women. For example when talking about polygamy, some students may be tempted to have a debate on it.

¹ Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, which is responsible to inspect and regulate services and care for children and young people education in the UK, then report it directly to the Parliament of the UK.

4.1. The Coherency of RE between Home and School Culture.

RE through many discussions has brought more opportunities for students to explore other religions besides what they had. In the school setting the pupils may learn about any topic, even the most controversial ones, and they are being provoked to explore and justify and issues based on their own understanding. This school tradition, though practical, requires cooperation; some students cannot bring home what they have learned in the school. Some parents are very strict regarding the religious education of their kids. Therefore, the students may not be able to share what they have learned in school, and they might be afraid to tell their parents due to the fact that what they have learned might be against what their parents expected or bring conflict between values that students have. The teacher I interviewed gives his comment as quoted below:

“Some parents might be afraid of their kids, they might be afraid of their kids being brainwashed.”

This is the political aspect of RE that makes parents worried about their children being brain washed, and this could happen within a family that has a strong commitment to their inherited religion and culture; as Lewis (2000) and Nesbitt (1991) pointed out, parents are always struggling to cultivate their culture to their children. As a result, children would not have wider opportunities to explore or to learn about other cultures, including other religions. Thus, I thought that this could be one of the barriers of Religious Education under the notion of “*learning from and learning about religion*”. Students could learn any issues at school, yet in practice they might not be able to take many of these benefits home with them. The teacher added, however, that some parents are very open and never worry about what their children have learned. He argued that students are being more selective to the RE lessons in terms of the themes and the topics they learn about. They will select which lessons are appropriate to bring home and tell their parents about, and they will keep quiet the lessons that might be not suitable or would likely cause problems if their parents knew.

Thus, I think that this is one of the positive values that can be taken from RE under Grimmitt’s idea of “learning about and learning from religion” in which students could have more opportunity to explore and be selective to any ideas they have learned. If I refer to what Wardekker and Miedema (2001,.p.82) pointed out about *individuation* and *socialization* in Religious Education in which individuation is a process that enables pupils to becoming competent to participate in society, so what happened to the students as a result of being selective to share what they have learned at school to other people, including their parents, fits within the process of individuation. They are trying to be competent in their environment. In terms of lifestyle, RE presented in the class is trying to look at the modest way to accommodate their life in a multicultural society like Britain, including dealing with issues in the society, for example about eating *hallal* food, which the booklet has advised is the modest way of saying *basmalah over a food and it can be to eat hallal* and the student seem untroubled about it. From this I could not practically measure a significant gap or incoherency between their home culture and school traditions regarding their lifestyle. But it could be said that there is modification on their way of life. The small gap here is that a number students could not share what they have learned in school to their family.

4.2. Socialization and Lifestyle

The two classes I observed had 16 and 14 students, and all of them were sitting mixed between male and female. The important part I want to address is that these classes also mixed between Shi’ite students and Sunni; however, a vast number of them were Shi’itism. As Tujfel and Turner (1986) and Turner (1985) stated, prototypical characters will become the main consideration for people to

classify themselves in society. In terms of this there are two models of self-categorization: first is an individual will decide to which category she/he would be a part of, and the second is that the environment will determine a person to be a part of a certain group of people in society.

Although in the first model a person could decide in which groups of society he/she belong to, it could also happen when the vast majority in the society have shared particular commonalities in a broad context, and within the society there are various options to choose, as within Islam for example there are many options to choose: they can chose to be *Shi'it*, *Sunni*, *Salafi* or *Wahabi*, or they can follow sects (*Mazhab*) *Maliki*, *Safi*, *Hanbali* or *Hanafi*. The second model is when a person or a group of society in a different larger culture has no option, so they have to be a part of the majority.

The second model is obviously the model that occurs to Sunni students in the college that I attended to study this field research. Sunni students were a minority group in vast number of Shi'ite students in the classroom, and they need to adapt themselves to the environment (school) and probably with their culture. Yung and Ebaugh (2001) asserted that the changing of religion status from majority to minority and transplantation in living context in new immigrant religious communities will yield modification on their identity, and it is a fundamental aspect to understand regarding their identity. Berry (2003), on the other hand, maintained that there would be a process of acculturation in which there is a process of cultural and psychological change following intercultural contact. Phinney (2003) then added that cultural change here could be alteration of a group's customs, economy, and political lifestyle while the changing in psychology toward the process of acculturation involved alteration of personal attitudes, and their cultural identity.

I found some acculturations processes that highlighted their lifestyle, thinking, and attitudes during their class interaction, like adaptation between Islamic tradition and modern lifestyle and thinking that there are alterations on absolutism of truth and religion principle, as Ameli asserted in Duderija (2008,p.377). Yet, the acculturation process here is not really clearly visualised, as they generally have a similar religious background; I could not recognize which one was Sunnite and which one was Shi'ite during the class.

All themes and topics discussed in the booklet cover various points of view from Shi'it and Sunni, and the booklet also discusses four Islamic sect perspectives (*Mazhab* *Maliki*, *Hanafi*, *Hanbali* and *Safi'i*) on each topic; these perspectives were presented in the booklet in balance as the representative identities for both groups of students. Here I could argue that within a religious education setting the differentiation between Shi'ite and Sunnite is not clearly shown for Muslim students in practical way, but the differences is emphasised on conceptualisation of ideas. And as result of this, there will be modification of identity (Yung and Ebaugh, 2001) and acculturation process (Berry, 2003) that should be done by Sunni students as a minority group in the schools in terms of socialization and relationship.

However, within the broad context (outside school), both groups as minority groups could be solid, as Waarderburg (2003, p.485) asserted that as a minority in the communal level, religion might play a fundamental role in reframing and integrating identity for the minority groups. Similar to Waarderburg, Myrdal (2000, p.39) asserting that religious and ethnic identity plays an important role for those who belong to minority groups, and religion is the most dominant among other aspects of identity. When looking at religions and ethnicity issues in America, Smith (1993) also asserts that in the context of immigrants there is a process of intensification on shared religious

commitment. What happens with the statement that Sunnite students always have a bad image about Shi'ite students, as I quoted below, is what needs to be considered.

“...Sunni students always have a bad image about Shi’ite, they always say bad things about Shi’ite... because they cover their face....”

The teacher added that when there is a Shi'ite student who has friends or has relationships with British people, and as long as there is no Sunni student who knows it, it would fine, but when there is a Sunni student who knows it then it would be a problem because they will tell the British people bad things about Shi'ite. However, I did find it. Probably because they are in a different setting (school setting) and the teacher is watching out for the students. I thought that the case of which the teacher spoke was rare to find, and that the statement tended to be a personal and emotional statement. It could be a kind of social recognition as Tzuriel (1984) pointed out in his multidimensional approaches to ego identity as social recognition, which means the degree to which an individual perceives society as valuing her/his talents and abilities. In this case it is not about valuing their talent (Shi'ite), but in order to be recognised and justified in society that Shi'ites are not what Sunni people negatively perceived.

In their lifestyle, whether they were influenced by western lifestyle and consider not covering themselves (*hijab*) or don't consider much about eating *hallal* food, the students spontaneously reject my statements in my class interview with them. *Wearing hijab is a must for women*, said a student. Some students are asking their teacher the names of several types of *hijab*, which are commonly found around them. Although there were some students in the class who were not wearing a *hijab*, they were also curious to know. Some students just kept silent on the question of whether they still considered consuming only *hallal* food or not. Yet, a vast number of them stated that they are always considering eating *hallal* food. The booklet they were using (p.12) also provided a text, which stated that:

“Islam will allow that if there is no evidence that the name of anything other than God has been pronounced over food but there is doubt as to whether the food was dedicated in the name of God, then it can be rendered fit for Muslim to eat my speaking the basmala over it”.

This idea gives more easiness to a Muslim when living in countries in which the majority are non-Muslim citizens in terms of food, and it is also probably the reason for those students who did not assertively stated their view of *hallal* food, and it can be a solution for them while living in the UK.

4.3. Gender and Equality

The students were very enthusiastic while watching video clips about Muslim homosexuals in the United Kingdom, and when they were talking about it, some students complained about a statement of a woman with a black *hijab* who support bisexuals and gays; in the clips she stated that Islam is very modest and accommodates gay and bisexual lifestyles. However, the issue of gay Muslims seems to challenge students; they were not ready to give too much protest, arguments, or opinions about the issue. When the teacher asked them to write their reactions about homosexuality and lesbianism, they clearly stated that “being a gay, homosexual and lesbianism is ‘against the natural order’, it is violent to the natural order, and do not act on it! It is bad,” and so forth. So, at this point there is no indication or statement that agreed with the idea of gay, homosexuality and lesbianism. I guess that it is probably because they have already known what they should do as a Muslim in general and as Shi'ite in particular, so it seems that they already know the position of

'gay, homosexuality and lesbianism' according to their belief. And they have committed to their values—what they are doing is just exploring more about the case without being contaminated with the ideas of being gay, homosexual and lesbian. I agree with Grotevant (1987) that the process of exploration is problem-solving behaviour that has purposes to gather information about the environment before making decisions. However, in this case I would say that they would probably make further contra-decisions after exploring this issue rather than giving positive comments or supporting those issues.

When they were asked different topics about women as shown in the table 4.3.1, it shows some complex thoughts. First is that '*women cannot marry more than one person at the same time*', which means that women have no right to engage in polyandry (to have more than one husband). The second is that polygamy is allowed as the consequence of a higher number of women than men on earth, which makes it possible for a man to have more than one wife. This idea was a kind of rationalization of modern society by looking at number of women compared to men, yet whether this reason is based on fact is questionable. The interesting part is that this idea implicitly brings a social and welfare message. If man can marry more than one woman in an attempt to minimize unattached women in the world, this has the potential to reduce many social risks such sex workers, prostitution, or having sex without a legal marriage contract. The second reason is not a purely religious reason (in Shi'ite perspective), but it tends to be a rationalization of the condition of women in the world today. The third reason is absolutely a lesson learned from Prophet Muhammad's life, in which he has more than one wife. So, it could be argued that they are against polyandry but allow polygamy to some extent. This view is commonly accepted in the whole Muslim world and all Muslim sects—polygamy is allowed with certain conditions while prohibited polyandry.

The students' ideas between 'mother' and 'duties of women', both ideas look slightly different. Students here clearly stated that the duties of women are cooking, looking after children, and fulfilling household needs. This is obviously a traditional view about women under the dichotomy that women have to care about the household and the father is the leader of the household, and has duties to provide food, money, clothes, etc., for the family. So in this context women are associated with domestic affairs. It can be seen that holding status of mother is slightly different from being women in general. As the duties of a mother are nursery, teaching, and taking care them, a mother for them is the most respected person in the world and is the power or the backbone of Islam. They believe that "*heaven is under mother's feet*" so if they want their life saved on earth and life after death, they must respect their mother.

While *izzat* is refers to the honour for women (wives and daughters) are expected to uphold by conforming to a certain role; if they make a mistake then they could be beaten as honour to the family. What students have written, which more or less copied into the table above, it shows that they still maintaining this tradition; however, during the class interaction some students (female) were arguing that they do not like to be beaten. Some women might be afraid that this tradition will lead to domestic violence, yet women, especially mothers, have special status and higher positions than men, as can be seen from fig.4.3.1, and Fig.4.3.2, which I got in the classroom. In fig.4.3.1 and fig.4.3.2, show two different perceptions that students have presented on those papers. The ideas shown in the picture in the fig.4.3.1 can be assumed to present "*women must dress modestly*", "*heaven is under mother's feet*" and refer to Islamic hadits (Islamic juries prudence) regarding women; those ideas are strongly believed by Shi'ite people in particular. Meanwhile in fig.4.3.2, contains ideas that could be assumed as the real life of women in modern times. For example, they said that "*in Muslim countries, women's thoughts are not taken into consideration as much as*

man's" and "*man would be more thinking on what women are not allowed to do than women think on what they can do.*" These three figures represent Islamic thoughts and modern (western) thoughts of students in which students were challenged to see how women were treated based on Islamic views (Shi'ite thoughts), and as a result, women's thoughts in Islamic countries were not taken into consideration as much as women in western countries that do not practice Islamic values and beliefs. Students were challenged between what they already had in their life (Islamic thoughts about women) and the consequences of these thoughts. On the other hand, mother as a woman has a higher position than man, as can be seen in fig.4.3.3. "*Mother has higher status than father since mentioned in hadit, the mother is mentioned 3x than the father showing you should respect her.*"

It could not be said that Islamic thoughts do not treat men and women equal, but it seems that students were looking for another way in which women could be put and treated equal to men in the modern world. At this point, students were critically exploring ideas and the consequences of the ideas regarding women's lives through two different perceptions. Nevertheless, in fig.4.3.2, although it seems like all the thoughts are rather emotional and negative in their perception of women in the Muslim countries, statements like "*reason on family life and women would be dominated in thoughts of a male as it is a MAN MADE WORLD*" and "*Men tell women how good they are in the eyes of Islam but then contradict,*" besides tending to pose negative perceptions in which they are implicitly trying to see women as marginalized people in the Islamic view.

As the teacher stated that the more controversial topics in RE lessons is about women rather than topics that are related to other religions. Yet, this opinion could not be generalized as to whether a topic about women could be a difficult one in RE lessons for other Muslim groups such as *Sunni, Wahabi and Salafi*. However, it could be argued that Shi'ite students are the Muslim community who support women to get their proper rights, and indeed wants more rights for women than men, as they believe that women and men are not of equal position, although this idea is rather contradicted than what we have seen in the modern world today—in which women are being empowered to have equal positions and rights as men.

5. CONCLUSION

Religious Education in British schools has encouraged students to be evaluative and critically examine ideas presented in the RE. And this method is really effective when presenting phenomenal issues supported with pictures or video clips. In spite of the benefits offered from the method, the teacher as a mediator will probably encounter difficulties dealing with various thoughts and may not be able to explore all the students' ideas presented. In regard to personal identity status between *commitment* and *exploration*, the findings indicate that students tend to explore more about the topics presented. However, in a practical way I could not recognise that there were any significant changes in their identity status as Shi'ite, because they always maintain their ways life and lifestyle, including their perceptions when viewing the world's phenomena. It shows that they had already committed to certain beliefs and values and are loyal to those beliefs and values, which represents their actual commitment to those values and beliefs. Therefore, in the RE context, their identity status could be determined as "*moratorium status*", in which they have stated that they are already committed to sets of goals, values, and beliefs prior to exploring those issues presented in the classroom.

In gender issues, although they hold this strong principle about women, the indications show that they are starting to change their identity status and moving to *achieved identity status* as the result of previous explorations made. However, this is not the end point of their identity formation, it is a continuous process, so their identity will continuously be constructed and reconstructed as their

personal achievement. In RE pupils are being encouraged to be critical and selective under the notion of 'learn from and learn about,' and it helps them to develop their personal capacity, although there is a small gap between home culture and school tradition regarding the contents transferred to students at school. Number students would not be able to share with their parents what they learned in school, as a result, they have to be selective to choose which lessons could be shared and which could not.

Polygamy	Women cannot marry more than one person at the same time, There are more women in the world than men, so polygamy addresses that no one ends up alone , Prophet had married more than one wife
Mother	Love more than father, Heaven is under the feet of mother, As backbone of Islam, Educating Children
Duties of Women	Cooking , Looking after children and household, Fulfil household needs
Izzat	Family do honour killing to keep izzat, Reputation lost if society finds you're gay

Table 4.3.1.1. Matrix of student's Ideas about Polygamy, Mother, Duties of Women and Izzat

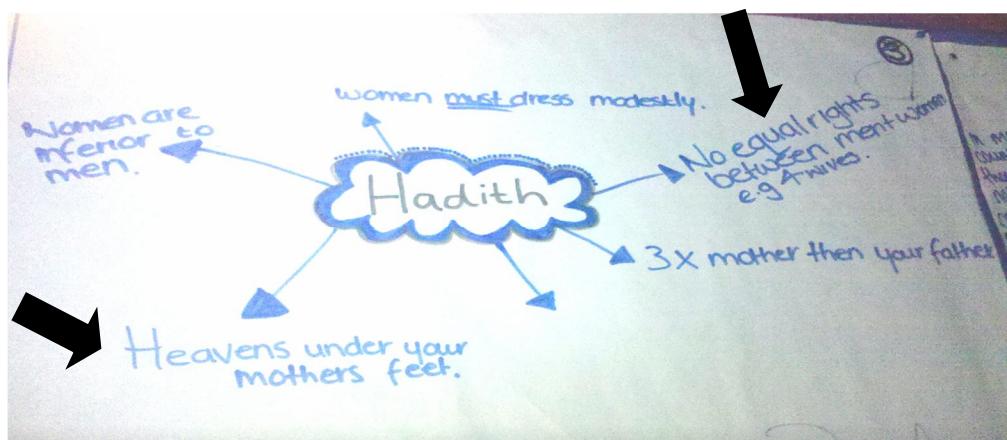


Fig.4.3.1. Students' thoughts about Women and Mother

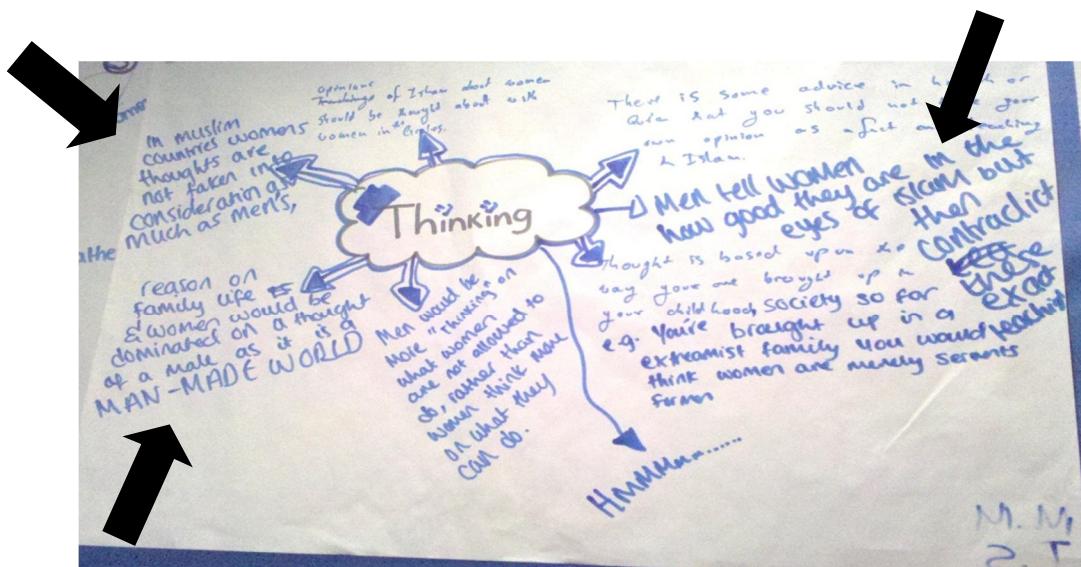


Fig.4.3.2. Students' thoughts about Women and Mother

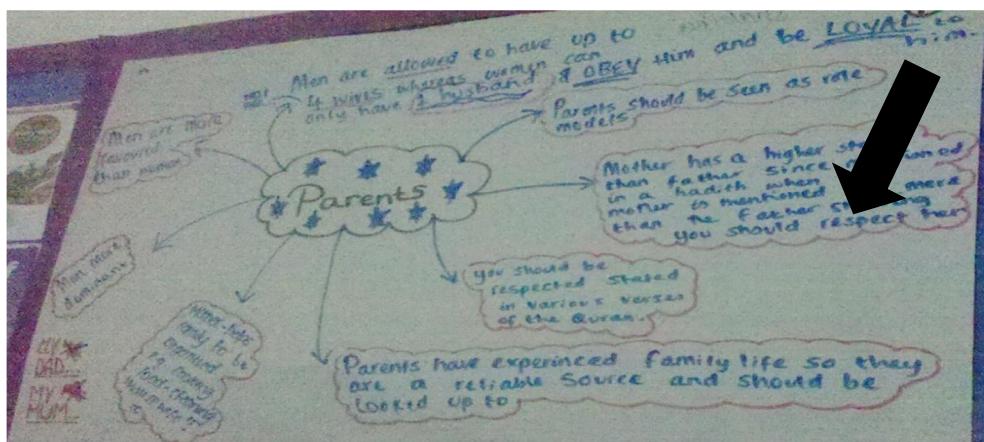


Fig.4.3.3 Students' thoughts about Women and Mother

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