

Chapter Seven – Victims Rights and the Challenge of Discrimination

Chapter summary

This chapter considers forms of collective mobilization and their importance in engaging with institutionalised racisms and promoting change. This chapter covers:

- How the hegemony of whiteness organises and structures a range of modalities of racism as different modes of white governmentality. For example, institutionally racist policing practices and acts of racist violence are both underpinned by hegemonic notions of whiteness and reflect different modes of white governmentality rather than completely unrelated acts.
- How ethnically marked spaces are being used to discipline local minority groups.
- How collective mobilisations entail challenging perceived practices of racist government at the level of both local and central state, as well as mobilising to defend space against far-right activity.
- How the mobilisation of black and minority ethnic women in Britain has been extremely important in highlighting and challenging racially gendered state practices, particularly in the face of threatened use of violence.

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Case study: The criminalization of Muslim young people in the war on terror

The construction of Muslim young people as threatening has been fuelled by a series of moral panics about widespread Muslim student extremism which greeted the activities of two tiny fringe groups – *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and *al Muhajiroun*, both of which have had extensive histories of involvement in hate crimes (particularly anti-Semitism and homophobia), and which have expressed support for terrorism. Media accounts have played a key role in shaping debates about Muslims in Britain (Poole 2002), often exaggerating the size and significance of these groups. Because of the lack of empirically reliable sources, these problematic accounts became a dominant source of information about Muslim young people. Articles on the threatening activity of Muslim young people became more widespread (Bright, 1994; Fisher, 1994; Sanders, 1995). While there was no doubt among Muslims and non-Muslims about the threat posed by groups such as *al Muhajiroun*, Muslim young people were increasingly represented as though such groups typified the Muslim experience, or as though the groups were of a large size. This has been significant, for research has demonstrated that Muslims in Britain who have actively challenged Islamic extremism have often actually been confused with and stereotyped as extremists themselves (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010, p.: 3).

Growing concerns about extremism among young people led simultaneously to requests for government action to help deal with the problem of Muslim student extremism (Carvel, 1995) and the rise of reports of increasingly Islamophobic attitudes against Muslim students (Bristow, 1996; Socialist Worker, 1995). In one famous case, it was reported that an innocent Muslim student elected as President of a university students union had found himself being accused of having masterminded a fundamentalist coup, even though other students dismissed him as too apolitical. Meanwhile, student Islamic Societies became a focus for students' resistance to racism, and increasingly focused on democratic constitutional campaigns to improve university provisions in ways which could both challenge negative representations of Muslims, for example, by participating in Islam Awareness Week and anti-racism campaigns, and facilitate the integration and inclusion of Muslim students and their needs in universities. Media accounts continued to emphasize the 'extremist' threat (Manning, 1996; Taher, 2000), and the association between Muslim students and extremism was reinforced when new guidance was issued on tackling *Extremism and Intolerance on Campus* (Committee for Vice Chancellors and Principals, 1998). Increasing tensions led to partnership work between the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) and National Union of Students (NUS) to challenge all forms of racism, including Islamophobia. In 2005, FOSIS released a report highlighting Muslim student experiences of racism following the 7/7 attacks and underlining the pro-British, anti-extremist views of the majority of Muslim students (Federation of Student Islamic Societies, 2005). The work of the NUS and FOSIS to challenge the racism faced by ordinary students was built upon in 2005 with the production of a report which reframed the problem of extremism in terms of a broad conception of hate crimes. This had the potential to recognise the extent to which Muslim students

can be victims, as well as perpetrators, of hate crimes (Universities UK / Equality Challenge Unit / Standing Conference of Principals, 2005). However, a further report claiming to have found widespread evidence of Islamic extremism activity on campus (Glees and Pope, 2005) fuelled concerns. Despite trenchant criticisms concerning the accuracy of the report (MacLeod, 2006), further guidance targeting this increasingly deviantised population was issued in 2006 (DfES, 2006). Although this was questioned by many in the university sector, with anti-racist campaigners, trade unions, and many university staff voicing their concerns, further guidance was issued in 2008 (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2008) at a time when Muslim women's clothing was increasingly problematised (Guardian, 2006) and spaces for collective worship were being viewed not as means of incorporating Muslim students in institutional life but as representing breeding grounds for extremism (Curtis, 2008). Further, additional guidance was being issued in 2011.

Universities have thus faced a range of demands to counter extremism and radicalisation among Muslim young people. The case of Hicham Yezza, a postgraduate student who was arrested by counter-terrorism police for reportedly printing off a document about Islamist terrorism which he had downloaded from a US government website for legitimate research purposes. However, this also reflects a wider web of practices through which Muslim young people have come to be subjected to increased surveillance in a range of institutional settings to a quite alarming extent:

'Islamophobia finds expression at an institutional and organisational level in relations with both individuals and collectives, whether in the hiring, employment and deployment of Muslim staff, or in the approach by

institutions, organisations and professions in their work with the Muslim community. They are experienced in the micro detail of the transactions of everyday life: walking down the street, shopping, driving the car, taking the underground, carrying a rucksack, in the work place, socialising after work, at school, at university, at a restaurant, passing through customs and immigration, watching TV, reading newspapers, etc.’ (Khan 2001, pp85-6).

Exploring this concern, Khan notes that youth workers involved in work with Muslim young people, including those employed through the Youth Offending Service’s Youth Inclusion Programmes, are under particular pressure to report Muslim young people to the police as potential terrorists, further claiming that ‘mono perceptions of Muslim communities and ‘Muslimness’ allow random connections to mark out a young offender with conviction for theft as a potential terrorist, even though the terrorism offender profile – according to leading criminal law advocates – suggests otherwise. With the reversal of the burden of proof and the ‘with us or against us’ logic of the War on Terror, which informs the Prevent strategy, challenge, contestation, resistance or refusal to work on PVE agendas, results in Muslim youth workers themselves being seen as part of the problem: ‘radicalisers’ rather than ‘de-radicalisers’ (Khan 2011, p.88).

In this context, debates about Muslim young people and extremism are complex. On one level they indicate the potential for further stereotyping and miscarriages of justice involving Muslims. On another level they illustrate the ways in which a wide range of institutions has been mobilised to survey a group racialized as a suspect community. In highlighting this, the case study also helps to show how this discourse

set the scene for the treatment of Muslims more generally throughout the war on terror, providing the grammar through which Muslims could be described as a threat, and the rationale for more punitive treatment of a group racialized as a suspect community.

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