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6. Policing Muslim Communities in Partnership: 'Integration', Belonging and Resistance

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The recently implemented Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTSA 2015) has placed a statutory duty on schools, colleges, universities and other public-sector bodies to actively demonstrate they are tackling 'radicalisation'. The Act, which is part of a wider counter-terrorism state strategy attempting to address 'non-violent extremism', has been widely criticised by civil liberties groups, academics and campaigners for being ill thought-out, a threat to free speech and ultimately counter-productive. In particular, many of the criticisms have centred on the assertion that Muslim individuals, groups and communities will continue to be the specific targets of this latest approach. Despite protestations to the contrary, given what is known about the impact of previous iterations of UK counter-terrorism policy, it is indeed certain that Muslims in particular will bear the brunt of this latest intensification. Whilst partnership working between the police and other agencies has existed in various forms in the context of counter-terrorism policy over the past decade, the new formalised approach as mandated by the CTSA 2015 demonstrates a marked departure from previous policy. This new mandatory partnership policing in the context of counter-terrorism is significant for requiring non-police agencies to take on what are essentially policing responsibilities, such as teachers and lecturers monitoring students for signs of 'radicalisation'. In problematizing these developments I make reference to two research projects: my PhD study, which examined partnership policing; and my on-going research collaboration with Professor Scott Poynting, which focuses on the integration demands placed upon British Muslims. The potential is for the CTSA 2015 and this new partnership-policing approach to intensify what is already known about UK counter-terrorism policy and the policing of the Muslim community; that it is implemented despite an evidence base, is fundamentally racist by explicitly targeting specific minority groups, and ultimately leads to the further alienation and marginalisation of an already demonised and criminalised group.

Counter-terrorism Policing *beyond the Police*

My PhD research consisted of an extensive ethnographic study examining partnership policing across three different marginalised communities in order to understand the relationship between police officers, partner agencies and residents. In contrast to findings from previous studies, my research found that police working in partnership with typically social-welfare oriented agencies, such as the local authority and housing departments, did not result in 'softer' policing. Rather, due to the dominance of the police within these partnerships, the role of policing was extended *through* these agencies. For instance, staff from partner agencies actively explored and pursued enforcement opportunities against local residents, prioritising a punitive over a welfare focus, and 'success' was frequently measured through such a police-centred lens. Some of the findings and lessons from my PhD could be readily applicable to the implementation of the CTSA 2015, in particular those aspects of the requirement for specified authorities such as schools, colleges and universities to have a mandated responsibility for tackling 'radicalisation' and 'non-violent extremism'.

Perhaps the key element of the CTSA 2015 for those working within the specified authorities is the compulsory requirement for them to engage in the policing of counter-terrorism. The extensive academic literature on the subject points to the racialised way in which the so-called 'war on terror' has taken place, with BME communities and those regarded as 'Muslim' subjected to intense police scrutiny through the discriminatory PREVENT and Channel government counter-terrorism initiatives.¹ Through the extension of such widely discredited programmes, there is little if any scope for a meaningful and positive outcome that does not result in stigmatising and criminalising Muslim and BME communities. This new method of partnership policing imposes a dangerous responsibility on individuals such as teachers, lecturers and health workers – individuals whose work is in the field of

education, social welfare, healthcare, not criminal justice and counter-terrorism. The consequences of this cannot be overstated. The monitoring and reporting of Muslim students to the authorities, based on abstract reasoning such as a change in perceived levels of religiosity and dress sense, will severely damage and rupture the social bonds that young British Muslims, an already demonised group, have with institutions and in spaces where they previously felt safe to express their views and engage in public life in the same manner as their non-Muslim peers. It is likely too that the singling out and criminalisation of minorities will occur not only because of preconceived biases, prejudices and misconceptions, but also because the CTSA 2015 *compels* individuals within the specified authorities to engage with it. Failure to do so, remarkably, could potentially result in prosecution.

‘Integration’ and Belonging – the Marginalisation of British Muslim Communities

My on-going research collaboration with Professor Scott Poynting, examining the integration demands made on British Muslims, brought out a number of themes which related to how this group experiences marginalisation and criminalisation. Nazia, an IT professional in her mid-40s, spoke of how her peers had gone to significant lengths to evidence their Britishness:

I think some of them spend a lot of their time trying to prove that they belong, you know, to the extent where you see whenever there’s an event they’ll have a British flag out, you know? And it’s just like, ‘Well, nobody else has to do that.’ You know, it’s not expected from anybody.

Nazia further spoke of the divisions she believed were being created by consistent demands placed on Muslims to integrate in Britain:

So I think actually when they question the community’s integration and all the rest of it, what they’re actually doing is just increasing the divisions, because now people are having to justify being here or belonging or feeling British. And, you know, you shouldn’t have to justify it. The fact that you live here should be enough.

Sharaz, a youth worker in his early 30s spoke of the external pressures he and his friends faced in order to balance their British and Muslim identities:

You have to work very hard to ‘integrate’ in inverted commas ... I think there’s a lot of effort that me and my mates put in to try and be British, try and live up to a certain expectation or what the people, the wider community, have in mind of how we should act and I think there’s more of ... an added pressure to be extra British because ... we’re from a different ethnicity and particularly ... of a particular religion. So there’s that added pressure that we, something happens, we have to go and condemn it. We have to come out and say, ‘No’, and then we’d have to make an extra effort, you know, to be nice or to go and do something unconventionally good that may oppose their view of our religion, if you know what I mean.

These views are typical of those from British Muslims in our study, many of whom felt conflicted, alienated, marginalised and criminalised as British Muslims. Several respondents also made reference to not feeling as though they belong in Britain at all, having to face discriminatory policing and frequent hostility from members of the general public and a biased media. The CTSA 2015 is likely to significantly affect the sense of belonging felt by British Muslims, and the young people of this community in particular. In schools, colleges and universities, young British Muslims can anticipate an unprecedented level of scrutiny directed at them, focusing directly on their appearance, changes in behaviour, attitudes and opinions. The consequences of allowing counter-terrorism policy and practice to be pursued within educational, healthcare and public-sector settings can only lead to deleterious outcomes for British Muslims. One outcome is likely to be the silencing of, or at the very least the marginalisation of, British Muslim voices within these institutions.

Requirements, Consequences and Resistance

It has rightly been pointed out that the CTSA 2015 has potentially substantial consequences for individuals, communities and groups across Britain and particularly those engaged in political protests and campaigning. However, it also has to be accepted and acknowledged that it is British Muslims and BME communities in particular that will face the ramifications of this legislation. Following a trajectory of racialised policing under the guise

of the 'war on terror' British Muslims face an often biased and hostile media, an increase in anti-Muslim attacks, consistent demands to integrate, and now, it appears, suspicion and monitoring by their fellow citizens including teachers, lecturers and doctors. What is abundantly clear from the development of counter-terrorism policy over the past decade and now from the introduction of the CTSA 2015 is that British Muslims are not afforded the same status as other citizens. Possessing British citizenship certainly does not immediately translate into *acceptance* as a fellow Brit. The requirement for schools and colleges to teach and demonstrate 'British values' through their curricula perhaps evidences this most starkly.

However, despite the counter-terrorism policing gaze extending to schools, colleges, universities and other institutional settings, there is ample evidence of the potential for resisting the processes of criminalisation. The Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) and National Teachers' Union (NUT) have both passed motions at meetings during their National Congress that condemn the introduction of PREVENT into their work. Similarly, the National Union of Students' (NUS) at their national conference voted to oppose PREVENT. It is important that this type of opposition exists, but even more important that it sustains beyond rhetoric. It is also the role of civil liberties groups, human rights organisations and social justice campaigns to highlight the abuses of PREVENT and support the individuals who will undoubtedly be impacted by its latest implementation. Indeed, many such groups have carried out advocacy and casework over a number of years for affected individuals and groups with little to no funding.

Another way in which this latest counter-terrorism initiative can be resisted is through local grassroots community campaigns. Police monitoring groups such as the Newham Monitoring Project (NMP) have been in existence for decades, campaigning around the issues of police racism, violence and harassment and operating completely independently from state organisations and accountability structures. In recent years new police monitoring groups have emerged in the UK, such as the Northern Police Monitoring Project (NPMP) based in Manchester, of which I am co-founder and joint convenor. The work of organisations such as NMP, NPMP and other police monitoring groups will likely have to adapt to meet the new demands set out by the CTSA 2015, which formally extend counter-terrorism policies and practices beyond the role of the police. This resistance is urgently required in order to respond to what ultimately amounts to a continued intensification of the policing of the British Muslim community.

Note

1. PREVENT is a government counter-terrorism initiative first established in 2006 with the remit of preventing terrorism. Channel is part of the PREVENT strategy and is a multi-agency 'de-radicalisation' programme tasked with identifying and working with individuals who are believed to be at risk of being drawn into terrorism. Both PREVENT and Channel have been widely criticised by human rights groups, Muslim civil organisations and community groups, academics, student bodies, trades unions and anti-racism campaigners.