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A Common 'Outlawness': Criminalisation of Muslim Minorities in the UK and Australia

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Abstract

Since mass immigration recruitments of the post-war period, 'othered' immigrants to both the UK and Australia have faced 'mainstream' cultural expectations to assimilate, and various forms of state management of their integration. Perceived failure or refusal to integrate has historically been constructed as deviant, though in certain policy phases this tendency has been mitigated by cultural pluralism and official multiculturalism.

At critical times, hegemonic racialisation of immigrant minorities has entailed their criminalisation, especially that of their young men. In the UK following the 'Rushdie Affair' of 1989, and in both Britain and Australia following these states' involvement in the 1990-91 Gulf War, the 'Muslim Other' was increasingly targeted in cycles of racialised moral panic. This has intensified dramatically since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the ensuing 'War on Terror'.

The young men of Muslim immigrant communities in both these nations have, over the subsequent period, been the subject of heightened popular and state Islamophobia in relation to: perceived 'ethnic gangs'; alleged deviant, predatory masculinity including so-called 'ethnic gang rape'; and paranoia about Islamist 'radicalisation' and its supposed bolstering of terrorism. In this context, the earlier, more genuinely social-democratic and egalitarian, aspects of state approaches to 'integration' have been supplanted, briefly glossed by a rhetoric of 'social inclusion', by reversion to increasingly oppressive assimilationist and socially controlling forms of integrationism. This article presents some preliminary findings from fieldwork in Greater Manchester over 2012, showing how mainly British-born Muslims of immigrant background have experienced these processes.

Keywords

Integration, Muslims, Islamophobia, criminalisation, Britain, Australia.

Introduction

Since the mass immigration recruitments that followed World War II, 'othered' immigrants to both the UK and Australia have faced 'mainstream' cultural expectations to assimilate, and various forms of state management of their incorporation into the receiving society. Perceived failure or refusal to integrate has historically been constructed as deviant, though in certain policy phases this tendency has been mitigated by cultural pluralism and official multiculturalism. This paper explores what happened to social-justice forms of integration under an earlier generation of labour parties in these countries, when poll-driven populism replaced egalitarian objectives as neo-liberalism became entrenched.

At critical times, hegemonic racialisation of immigrant minorities has entailed their criminalisation, especially that of their young men. In the UK following the 'Rushdie Affair' of 1989 and in both Britain and Australia following these states' involvement in the 1990-91 Gulf War, the 'Muslim Other' was increasingly targeted in cycles of racialised moral panic and the attendant state crackdowns (Poynting and Mason 2007). This has of course intensified dramatically since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the ensuing 'War on Terror' (Poynting and Mason 2006).

Muslim immigrant communities in both these nations have, over the subsequent period, been the subject of heightened popular and state Islamophobia in relation to: perceived 'ethnic gangs'; alleged deviant, predatory masculinity; and paranoia about so-called Islamist 'radicalisation' and its supposed bolstering of terrorism (Kundnani 2007; Lentin and Titley 2011; Poynting, Noble, Tabar and Collins 2004). In this context, the earlier, more genuinely social-democratic and egalitarian aspects of state approaches to 'integration' have been supplanted, briefly glossed by a rhetoric of 'social inclusion', by reversion to increasingly oppressive assimilationist and socially controlling forms of integrationism.

From assimilation to integration

This paper begins by sketching the shift to what Poynting and Mason (2008) – following Kundnani's (2007) account of the 'new integration' – have called the 'new integrationism'. We offer some examples of how the Muslim Other has been criminalised, with the various instances of criminal inclination being attributed to the failure of Muslim communities to accept British and Australian values and integrate. So-called 'ethnic crime gangs', sexual violence and Islamist terrorism are the examples adduced here, though there are others. We consider how populist reactions and political posturing have seen the state actually modelling Islamophobia, and doing too little to stem anti-Muslim hate crime, all too often blaming the victim. Finally, we present some findings from fieldwork in Greater Manchester during 2012, showing how mainly British-born Muslims of immigrant background have experienced these processes.

Consider these two propositions:

1. 'Our society must integrate Muslim immigrants'.
2. 'Muslim immigrants must integrate into our society'.

In the first sentence, Muslim immigrants are the direct object. The subject, which must do the integrating, is *our society*. In the second sentence, *our society* is the indirect object. It is the *Muslim immigrants*, in this version, who must do the integrating.

The first statement expresses some of the notion of social adaptation to cultural and religious diversity that was perceived by liberal intellectuals and politicians from the late 1960s and early 1970s to be necessary to accommodate the masses of culturally different newcomers. This in time came to be the leading approach to cultural diversity, and was propagated and practised in the media, in the education system, and in the other important apparatuses of hegemony in

British and Australian society. Despite its predominance until the 1990s, it was never uncontested.

The second statement expresses the opposing fundamentally assimilationist position on integration, that always remained in common sense beneath the rhetoric, and which has returned to the fore since the 1990s and prevails today. The seminal approach to the 'problems of integration' in the first sense was put forward in Britain by the then Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins (1966, in Parekh 1997), advocating: 'Not a flattening process of assimilation, but equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance'. Note that it explicitly disavows assimilation.

The Australian counterpart may be found in a 1973 speech by Labor Immigration Minister Al Grassby who, in expounding his vision of multiculturalism, proposed to include Australians of all cultural backgrounds into what he called the 'family of the nation'(Grassby 1973a), by 'drawing upon the rich diversity of its people' who would 'share our different heritages' (Grassby 1973b). That 'drawing upon' and 'sharing' as well as the principles of 'equal opportunity for all' which were necessary, for Grassby, to manage this change without *dis*-integration, became pillars of Australian multiculturalism.

Islamophobia and the new integrationism

From about 1990, Australian multiculturalism and the somewhat weaker form in Britain were undermined by right wing attacks that characterised it as a 'politically correct' imposition by cosmopolitan elites with disregard for those disadvantaged strata from the dominant national culture who were supposedly most disrupted by it (Lentin and Titley 2011). In fact the real insecurities suffered by those socially marginalised groupings, who projected them onto immigrants as an imagined cause, were largely collateral damage of neo-liberalism.

Now this happened to coincide with the First Gulf War of 1990-91, in which both countries were part of the US-led 'coalition of the willing'. Racist enemy-images were propagated and a surge of hate crime ensued in both nations. In the UK, as in Australia, Muslims of all ethnic backgrounds, not only Iraqis, had their allegiance to Britain questioned and demonstrations of loyalty were demanded. The logic of this positioning is that no token of loyalty, no proof of integration and willingness to belong, can ever be enough. The year before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Salman Rushdie affair had exposed British Muslims to widespread accusations of failure to integrate, a charge by which they were othered as Muslims rather than as Asians or other minority ethnicities such as Arab or African ones.

In Australia over the 1990s, there was a transition in othering from 'Arab Other' to the 'Muslim Other'. We can see these terms of demonising shift dramatically in the period from the 1998 killing of teenager Edward Lee in Western Sydney and the associated furore over so-called 'Lebanese gangs' (Collins, Noble, Poynting and Tabar 2000) to a series of group sexual assaults in Sydney in 2000 and 2001 and popular outrage over what was widely labelled 'ethnic gang rape' (Dagistanli 2007).

During this shift, the increasingly anti-Muslim aspect of this racism becomes associated with an ideology of incapacity, unwillingness or refusal of Muslim immigrants to integrate into British or Australian society. We find here a shift in the meaning of 'integrate' towards a blaming, supervising and even punitive one, in which the state becomes involved. This was especially apparent after 2001 and even more so in these countries after the 7 July London transport bombings in 2005 with the public worrying and racialised moral panic over so-called 'home-grown terrorism'.

Criminalising the Muslim Other

We can see even in 2001 how this Islamophobia predated 9/11 in both Britain and in Australia, through the reaction to some key events. The causes of the riots in Northern England in the summer of that year were attributed both in the popular media and in discussions surrounding official reports such as the Ouseley¹ (2001) and Cattle (2001) reports, to the lack of integration, in particular among Muslim communities in the areas concerned. It is fair to point out that both the transitive and intransitive senses of integrate are used in the official reports, but the blaming sense was used by the accredited experts, not to mention right-thinking media and political commentators. This is conveyed well by Arun Kundnani, in skewering the notion of non-integration as 'self-segregation':

The community leaders blamed a lack of discipline, a decline in Muslim values and the undue influence of Western culture. The popular press blamed the community leaders who had failed in their allotted role: to control 'their people'. Then it was the inherent separatism of Islamic culture that was to blame – these people did not want to integrate; they were 'self-segregating'. (Kundnani 2007: 54)

Very similar dynamics of Islamophobic moral panic occurred in Australia in relation to so-called 'ethnic gangs' in the 1990s, despite the little-noted fact that some leading figures in really existing criminal gangs of that time were of Lebanese Christian origin. The Australian moral panic in 2001 about 'boat people' asylum seekers as inassimilable and problematic was associated largely with their so-called 'Middle Eastern' origin – they were mainly fleeing Iraq and Afghanistan. It was neither Arab nor Asian culture specifically that was to the fore in these racist representations, but Islam. The asylum seekers were represented as dishonest, criminally inclined, prone to violence, misogynistic, and (especially, though not exclusively, after 9/11) likely to be supportive of terrorism. All of these purported attributes were associated with Muslims in the surrounding xenophobia, and that which had preceded it.

Then in 2000 and 2001, there were two series of group sexual assaults in the western suburbs of Sydney, in which there was a huge media and hence popular furore that had not occurred in comparable crimes. In these two instances that became notorious, the perpetrators were, respectively, mostly second-generation immigrants of Lebanese origin, and first-generation immigrants originating from the North-West provinces of Pakistan. All of these were from Muslim communities, and this aspect of their background was highlighted as the crimes were racialised as so-called 'ethnic gang rape'. The racialisation involved blaming entire Muslim communities in Australia for what was represented as a general lack of respect for women, a hatred of western culture and violent sexual aggression towards western women in particular, attendant in the second generation especially upon the refusal of the communities concerned to integrate with Australian values, respect Australian law and identify with the nation. These accusations resonate with contemporary anti-Muslim racism in Britain and indeed in continental Western Europe.

After 9/11 and the declaration of the so-called 'War on Terror', the Muslim 'enemy within' was again raised as a racialised folk devil, in Britain and in Australia, as during the Gulf War. Ironically, for countries in a coalition that had discovered oppression of women in Afghanistan as a late justification for the war there to secure 'regime change', many of the victims of the accompanying upsurge in anti-Muslim hate crime were women wearing the hijab. As the media and populist politicians, in the UK, Australia and elsewhere in the west, fetishised the Muslim veil as a symbol of non-integration in the West, so women wearing it were vilified and assaulted in public places. At this time, lack of integration in the form of deviantly excessive Muslim devoutness or religiosity became a marker for targeting by the state for surveillance and harassment.

The state targeting was heightened by the London transport bombings of July 2005 and popular worrying about 'home-grown terrorists'. What had moved the perpetrators, who were British-born and raised, to their acts of terrorism? The popular answer, contrary to the facts which became known about their lives, was lack of integration. Integration therefore must be demanded by the state in order to prevent so-called 'radicalisation' which nurtures terrorism. Whereas British foreign policy, from the latest Iraq war to Palestine, was stated by the London bombers as their motivation, this was implacably denied by the Blair government. What happened from this time, however, as Shane Brighton (2007) has pointed out, is that an oppositional stance on such foreign policy issues is taken by the state and its apparatuses of hegemony as evidence of a dangerous lack of integration – but only in Muslims.

Coercive integration regresses to assimilation

Thus Tony Blair (2006) the following year, five months after the launch of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion:

Integration ... is about values. It is about integrating at the point of shared, common unifying British values. It isn't about what defines us as people, but as citizens, the rights and duties that go with being a member of our society. ...

[W]hen it comes to our essential values – belief in democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, equal treatment for all, respect for this country and its shared heritage – then that is where we come together, it is what we hold in common; it is what gives us the right to call ourselves British. At that point no distinctive culture or religion supercedes our duty to be part of an integrated United Kingdom. ...

[W]e need – in the face of the challenge to our values – to re-assert also the duty to integrate, to stress what we hold in common and to say: these are the shared boundaries within which we all are obliged to live ...

'So how do we do this?' asked Blair, rhetorically? His answer: less political correctness, ensuring conformity to these values, tying funding to community cohesion and integration, policing forced marriages, revisiting immigration rules regarding arranged marriages, intervening in discrimination against women by mosques, vetting visiting preachers for English competency, vetting visiting speakers for radicalism, stressing integration in the national curriculum, regulation of faith schools and madrassahs to ensure tolerance and respect, and English tests for permanent residency. This is integration of a coercive, assimilatory sort, aimed pointedly at Muslims, and populistically articulating with anti-Muslim rhetoric about separatism, Shar'ia law, lack of respect for British law, misogyny, and linguistic self-segregation. Neither the succession to Brown as prime minister, nor the subsequent change of government made substantive difference to the British state's approach to these matters: those measures are virtually all now in place, with perhaps the most intensified and oppressive attention being the surveillance and policing of so-called radicalism.

These coercive approaches, it is true, were accompanied by more consensus-building approaches couched in the rhetoric of social inclusion from earlier New Labour emphases. Yet these were often transparently manipulative and used ham-fistedly for surveillance and suppression of radical opposition. New Labour, in government from 1997 to 2010, had largely emptied Labour's ethnic affairs policies of their equity and access imperatives, instead attempting to undercut the far right in populist scapegoating of immigrants and minorities, while propagating 'clash of civilisations' ideology to prosecute the 'war on terror'.

Muslims' lived experiences under new integrationism

We turn now to how this new integrationism is being experienced by the generation of British-born Muslims from immigrant families who came to adulthood with the accession of New Labour and have lived most of their adult lives with its demands. These are preliminary findings from interview research with British-born Muslims, mostly second-generation immigrants, conducted in 2012-13 in the Greater Manchester area.² The project involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty self-described British Muslims in and around Manchester. Equal numbers of men and women were interviewed. The interviews, of 40 minutes to an hour each in duration, were conducted by a British-born Muslim (man), and participants recruited through community contacts by 'snowballing'. They took place in the university and in public places such as cafes and, on some occasions, at the request of the interviewees, at their work-place or home. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants, and were professionally transcribed with anonymity protected. (Pseudonyms chosen or agreed to by the interviewees are used in this article.)

All interviewees described themselves as British Muslims. Most are in their twenties or early thirties. Though they had various levels of religious observance, all averred that being Muslim was a main part of their identities and their lives.

What being 'British' meant to them was less clear. There was a shared sense of being British by birth, by citizenship, by right. All spoke English as native speakers, were fully functional in British society, and were obviously familiar and competent with the culture and idiom of the country in which they had grown up, gone to school, studied, worked and lived. Britain was the only place that could be 'home', if only by default, since those that had visited their parents' countries of origin found themselves defined and treated as British – which of course they were. Yet all felt excluded from making this home theirs: they felt that no matter how much they participated in practice in British society, their belonging was routinely denied them in British culture and institutions. Cultural exclusion was a continual annoyance and occasional humiliating reminder of non-belonging; institutional racism was experienced as unjust and often downright oppressive.

Criminalisation and Islamophobia

Policing and security were encountered as the sharp end of this institutional racism, from racial profiling in motor vehicle policing to the perceived harassment and arbitrary nature of airport security targeting. Those more identifiably Muslim because of dress codes or whereabouts, for instance, found themselves more targeted for unwanted and unwarranted attention. Women who had begun wearing the *hijab* experienced more of this; some women had foregone these dress codes in order to appear more integrated and avoid the targeting. Men wearing beards or *shalwar kamiz*, or going to the mosque or in the street during a Muslim festival, felt singled out because of these identifying features. There was a near universal sense of being under suspicion, having to justify oneself, 'innocent until proven Muslim'. Shaukat, a 27-year-old British-born professional with Pakistani and British nationality, expressed it like this:

It's as though ... you're now a suspect of some kind of a crime or I don't know. It's hard to describe but I think 9/11 and 7/7 had a massive, massive impact on my life and the way people kind of look at me and people from my kind of faith group.

Shaukat resented the pressure to display assimilation in order to allay being seen as suspect:

Why should I have to give up the way, you know, I live my life or why should I change the way I live my life when I don't do anything wrong? I live, you know, a decent life where I ... don't do bad things, you know, what's wrong with that?

For him, it was particularly galling to be branded as terrorist or potential terrorist, since he had served in the British armed forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Sajjid, a 28-year-old British-born Pakistani dual national quoted what he said was an old saying. 'You're British until they take your passport away', he observed.

Tanvir, a 24 year-old British-born postgraduate student, answered the question about whether he felt he belonged in Britain by saying that he felt more Bengali than British. He spoke of becoming aware, in the mid-90s, that he was 'considered as the "other"'.

So, this idea of belonging is something that I've had difficulty with because the kind of conception of what it means to be British ... has always manifested itself to me as one which is exclusionary. Or certainly one which doesn't have any concern for what I feel or have to say or anything like that. ... I have friends who ... are in a similar position. So we have a kind of, a common 'outlawness' as it were.

Imran, a British-born teacher, could not instance anything in his 29 years that made him feel he belonged in Britain. 'I like to be seen as a British citizen first and then Pakistani', he said, 'but because of my complexion, everybody sees my parents' heritage first before they see my actual nationality. So, in my eyes, I'm British. In other people's eyes, I'm Pakistani.' These others' eyes included those of the police.

We do get harassed by police. That's one thing that annoys. It's getting worse and worse. Over the years, I've noticed police patrolling our area like more and more often, like on a daily basis. And it actually scares you, like, you know, 'What could be going on around my corner? What could be going on next door?' It makes you doubt other people's activities, like, 'What's he doing?' like, 'Why is he stopped by cops? Could he be doing this? Could he be doing that?' But again, most likely, random check-ups.

Imran, perhaps pragmatically, does not wear a beard or shalwar kamiz, but he seems angry that such options are denied to him and his co-religionists if they want to avoid suspicion: 'If I grew a beard and I wore my traditional clothing, I know I will encounter a hell of a lot of problems. ... So, yeah, I've got to be wary with how I look these days which in my opinion is stupid. ... Anyone with a beard is a terrorist. It's just stupid.'

Amber, a 31-year-old British-born lawyer of Yemeni parentage, is quite explicit about the pressure to stop wearing the hijab:

Actually I used to wear a hijab and I took it off. ... I felt like I couldn't manifest my religion or I couldn't dress the way I wanted and exacerbate the fact that I'm different because it will just result in me being excluded more from things like getting certain jobs. So you have to try, you know, I had to appear visually British.

...

When you wear a scarf in the UK, it is very notable how different people are toward you. Even people that you talk to on a daily basis like your colleagues, they treat you differently. ... Because of this impression that's given in the media that anyone that wears a hijab is militant almost.

Not only the dress code, but religious observance, especially regular prayers, was felt to be a marker of deviance and perhaps dangerousness. Amber explained that she no longer told people at work when she was stepping out to pray: just that she had something to attend to out

of the office for five or ten minutes. Rabia told how she becomes nervous about the call to prayer sounding on her mobile phone while on the bus:

I do subconsciously ... think sometimes ... people are judging me because of my scarf or people thinking, 'Here's another terrorist' and what not. Especially, I got this *azan* [Islamic call to prayer] on my phone that goes off. *Azan*, goes off certain times. Especially if I'm on the bus and it goes off, I mean, I quickly switch it off sometimes because I'm thinking people are going to think I got a bomb in there.

Experiences of integration and racialisation

Rabia is a 31 year-old office worker who migrated to the UK with her parents at the age of three. She does feel like she belongs in Britain, and appreciates the freedoms of British society. She believes that claims that some immigrant communities are not integrating into British society are:

... something that's just made up by the tabloid, to be honest with you – the media – that they're not integrated. How much more can you get integrated, do you know what I mean? ... Our generation, we're going out, we're going to the universities, we're going to college, we study. ... So, how we're not integrated? Yes, our parents may not be as integrated as we are because they're not as educated as we are, especially our mums. They've not had the opportunity that we have but – again that doesn't mean to say that they're not integrated. It does not make them any less integrated.

Educational opportunity, as Rabia sees it, is the key to being able to participate socially in ways that count as being integrated. That's the way the Labour Party used to see it, too, before it started echoing popular blaming of migrants for not integrating.

Amber, by contrast, does not feel the same belonging. Where Rabia sees mere curiosity, provided she is asked in the right tone, Amber senses exclusion.

When I was in my training to be a barrister, the first question I got asked in an interview is 'Where are you from?', even though I'm a British citizen. I've been born and raised here my whole life. And when I say it's in Liverpool, they say, 'No, originally where are you from?' Again, which made me feel like I didn't belong. ... When an instance like that happens, it makes you think that other people don't see you as British, which makes you question your own identity. And think, well, actually maybe I shouldn't be regarding myself as British.

Amber was familiar with the common criticisms of not integrating, but, like Rabia, thought them unfounded.

I feel like people are integrated as much as they can be. ... Me, personally, I went to a comprehensive school and mixed with everyone else in, like, my locality. ... Then I went to the university and I studied and I worked with other people in the society. And in that sense, I've always been integrated on an employment basis and education basis. And also on the social basis ... Most of my friends aren't from Yemen or have no connection to Yemen. So in that sense, I think I'm very well integrated. And if I do voluntary work, again, I don't care who I'm helping. I don't really think of, I often don't think of myself as Yemeni, I sometimes forget. I just think of myself as British Muslim. I identify myself by my religion not by my ethnicity. So I say that's not true. Muslims are very well integrated especially those who are second-generation of being born and raised here that don't know

any differently. It's just things which happen in the media and in the press, portraying images that we are not integrated. ... It's completely inaccurate. ... I can't see how I could be any more integrated than I am.

Experiences of racialisation and policing

There is good reason for Amber to take a more jaundiced view than Rabia of British people's curiosity about her. As a 14-year-old, she was violently assaulted by two male youths on her way home from school. They racially abused her, saying things like, 'You fucking Paki, go home!' They punched her, knocked her to the ground, kicked her, and left her bruised all over her body. When she reported this to the police, they not only trivialised the assault and took no action against identifiable assailants, but the male police officers also humiliated her with sexual harassment, suggesting she take off her tights and show them her legs.

But there were recent incidents as well.

Recently, I asked some policemen for directions and the policeman turned around and made a joke about the fact that I was an Arab scouser which is, because I'm from Liverpool. And then, when I asked him for an apology and threatened to make a complaint, he then arrested me. And when asked as to why I was being arrested, I was told to shut up and then pretended that the reason I had been arrested was because I was driving carelessly and swerving up and down the road. Even though I actually approached him on foot and I was not in my car. And when I said to him, 'But you just fabricated that incident,' he said, 'Well, my colleague has just seen you and we had to apprehend and stop you because you were swerving up and down the road.' And when I said to him, 'I'm a lawyer and I would very much like to see you run that in court so by all means go ahead and try to arrest me.' He started saying to me, 'You're not, you're not a lawyer, you're just a fucking Paki'.

Of course the false traffic charges against her were dropped once Greater Manchester Police heard from her barrister, but only on the condition that she did not proceed with her complaint.

About a week before the interview, she had a further racist encounter with the police, in which they threatened to use anti-terrorism powers against her. She had intervened, as an officious bystander, when she saw police harassing three Pakistani-background young men.

I said to the police, 'Why are you picking on these three young Pakistani lads? What have they done?' And the police officer said to me, 'Oh, they were playing dud music.' Dud as in bad music. So I said to the police, 'I didn't realise that was a criminal offence.' And then they said to me, 'Go away or we'll arrest you for terrorism.' And I said, 'What are you going to arrest me for?' And they said, 'Our powers in the terrorism legislation are quite broad and vast and we can arrest you for anything.' I just basically said to [the young men] to take their police numbers and put in a complaint if they feel like they're being racially picked on. And then the police officer said to me, 'You be careful, I've marked you. I've got your registration plates'.

This was not only an object lesson for the young men, as well as for Amber, about their citizen rights in Britain: it is an example of what police often do when called to account over racism. Our point is that the draconian anti-terrorism powers give them extra opportunity to invent cover stories and threaten retaliatory charges, as well as to discriminate. These powers were enthusiastically introduced, strengthened and defended by the Labour government, and the current Tory-led coalition was roundly condemned by Labour for supposedly weakening them –

though ever so slightly and in response to court challenges. The fear-mongering and authoritarian state approach was inherited from Thatcherism by New Labour, but refined by them and deployed to political advantage against immigrants, asylum seekers, Muslims, young people and other popular objects of fear and loathing.

The Muslim Male Other

The final theme from the interviews that we present here is the treating of Muslims as deviantly patriarchal and sexually violent. One instance is the attention to immigrant Muslim communities as supposedly more prone than white Anglo Britons to domestic and familial violence, and the attendant categories of forced marriages and so-called 'honour crime'. But recent events that concerned our interviewees, and were raised independently by nearly all of them, had to do with a notorious case of sexual abuse, serial rape and forced prostitution of vulnerable, socially marginal girls, that occurred in the Rochdale area of Greater Manchester (Orr 2012). Those convicted were Muslim men of South Asian origin. The media, public commentators, some police spokespeople and many politicians pronounced prolifically on this case as indicative of endemic problems in Muslim communities and called for serious intervention. Contemporaneous and equally notorious cases of sexual abuse of minors, including very comparable cases of criminal rings involved in grooming and sexual exploitation, demonstrated that the problem was indeed serious and endemic, but in the white, English population as well (Harker 2012). These cases were never described by the same 'accredited experts' (Cohen 2002) as problems of English culture or – heaven forbid – Christianity, and our interviewees severally remarked on this, to the point of saturation.

Rabia recounted:

... those guys from [Rochdale] ... that groomed the white girl ... [The media] did specifically mention they are Pakistani Muslim. I mean ... was there a need to put Muslim? ... If you said it's an Indian person, would you then put Indian Hindu? They would not – would they? [If] they are Indian Sikh, they wouldn't. If it's a British, white person, they wouldn't say Christian, would they? ... It's a person and ... whether he's a Muslim or Hindu, it doesn't matter, it's wrong; they acted wrong. So, why do you have to mention the word Muslim in it?

Sajid similarly complained:

Recently, when we had ... was it a nine or thirteen ... paedophiles in Rochdale, and it weren't taken as in, these are just paedophiles, these are sick people. It was taken as, these are thirteen Muslim paedophiles. And the tension that created within our society within Rochdale was unreal. ... It had nothing to do with their faith; what they had planned in their minds was absolutely sick. But for some reason the media had to include the word Muslim, and ... it portrays the whole community or the whole religion in this way.

Sajid mentioned the ensuing violent anti-Muslim attacks by the right-wing racist English Defence League (EDL), and observed, 'I think we had ... less protection from the police as well when these cases happened.'

Walid, a 27-year-old British-born Muslim with Pakistani parents, now a postgraduate student but who had formally worked for the police as a civilian staff member, commented on local Muslims in his home town of Rochdale being frightened to demonstrate against the EDL because of being collectively demonised over the infamous Rochdale 'grooming' case. He also commented on his community being targeted by police over extremism while the EDL were indulged and protected:

you look at the policing of the EDL for example and you see that they, despite their extremist activity, despite the fact that they propagate violence against Muslim communities and that they carry out violence against Muslim communities, they are not considered a threat in the same way and they are not considered extremist in the same way as other, Muslim, groups are.

Imran thus summed up the media's role in criminalising Muslims: 'The media gave us this name. If it's not drug trafficking, it's grooming. If it's not grooming, then, we're terrorists.'

Conclusion

These lived experiences of British Muslims in the current conjuncture raise questions of social justice for citizens of 'othered' minorities under really existing social democracy. It is true that labour parties cannot be blamed for the fear-raising and demonising campaigns of the tabloid media. Yet they do seem to be especially susceptible to them. New Labour in Britain, like post-Whitlam Labor in Australia, has been poll-driven and populist, ready to adopt reactionary rhetoric and socially unjust scapegoating policies if there are votes in it to be garnered from the far right. That has meant being tough on crime, tough on drugs, tough on gangs, tough on asylum seekers, tough on terrorism, and insistent on integration by Muslim minorities.

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¹ Written prior to the riots, but launched in July 2001, thus having a significant impact on the public discussion of them.

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