<u>Chapter Eight – Forms of Resistance</u>

Chapter summary

This chapter considers the individualised and collective forms of resistance to discriminatory practices, by black and minority ethnic groups who have been victimized, demonized and pushed to the margins of society. This chapter covers:

- The importance of anti-essentialist approaches to consider the ways in which members of the black and minority ethnic population can successfully resist and challenge racism and ascribed labels of racialised deviancy.

- Racism and resistance, when understood in anti-essentialist terms, are far more fluid and complex than have been previously appreciated.

- The case of miscarriages of justice which have occurred based on mistaken identities, as seen in the cases of Maher Arar and Jean Charles de Menezes.

- Resistance by appealing directly to the law itself, pursuing grievances through court actions.

- Resistance though developing media attention.

- The discursive logics of resistance to racism, for example, by Muslim students.

Links to SAGE articles

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Sheridan, Lorraine P. (2006) 'Islamophobia pre- and post- September 11th, 2001', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 21: 317-336.

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Tyrer, David and Ahmad, Fauzia (2004) *Muslim Women and Higher Education: Identities, Experiences, and Prospects: A summary report*, Liverpool: Liverpool John Moores University

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Case study: Resisting racism among a suspect population

The discursive logics of resistance to racism are illustrated by the ways in which Muslim communities have sought to resist racist criminalization and deviantization.

In many ways the emergence of a distinctly 'Muslim' identity in Britain has been closely interwoven with questions about resistance to racism. This emergence posed a particular challenge to expressions of racialised governmentality because it represented a display of considerable agency on the part of members of racialised populations in rejecting traditional ascribed racial labels in favour of self-selected modes of identifying. At an analytical level we can see how, following this decentring of the hegemonic grammar of 'race' for classifying and governing populations, a series of attempts were made to reinvigorate racial discourse. This most obviously

took the form of a racialisation of the emergent British Muslim identities, which were variously pathologised as threatening, backwards, extremist and irrational in ways which frequently cut across far right *and* 'progressive' discourse. In response to this racialisation, Muslims responded by mobilising to request various forms of protection against Islamophobia. Tyrer (2011) notes that one common response to this involved attempting to deny Muslims protection against anti-Muslim racism on the grounds that to be a Muslim is not to be a member of a 'race'. As Tyrer notes, since race is socially constructed, Muslims are no more or less a race than members of any other group that is racialised; what this line of argument therefore did was to re-centre problematic ideas of biological racial difference which have long been discredited.

If Muslim identity politics has thus centrally involved challenging and interrupting the ways in which racialised governmentality is expressed, it is also unsurprising that the very expression of Muslim identities has frequently been problematised within Islamophobic discourse. One way of responding to the challenges posed by the emergence of Muslim identities has involved pathologising them as excessively political. Thus the activities of a minority of fringe groups and individuals who hold extremist views are generalised as typical of all Muslims. Another racist response has involved pathologising other Muslims as voiceless and lacking in agency. This has been particularly true of representations of Muslim women, who have often been used in racist discourse as a slate on which racist representations of Muslim men are written as Muslim women's struggles have been appropriated in the service of a wider racism. In the face of this, an increasing body of literature has come to resist the racially-gendered caricature of the voiceless Muslim woman, instead highlighting the agency of Muslim women. Bilge (2010, p.10) notes that the heavily stereotyped image of the veiled Muslim woman has become iconic, simultaneously portraying her

as a victim of Muslim culture and a threat to the west. Afshar, Aitken and Franks (2005) have emphasised the ways in which Muslim women express a complex politics of resistance:

'Alliances between Muslim women of different colours and ethnicities and their radical interpretations of Islam and its teachings have helped create a new dynamic formulation of British Islamic identity that is bridged by bonds of friendship and scholarship. Their lived experiences make it possible for them to have hyphenated identities which are experienced as an enrichment rather than a lack. The new Muslims may be 'Lassi Muslims', but they are also enlightened, cohesive and able to place themselves within both their kin and their community groups and within the host society. They may be the ones who reach out and even marry across the ethnic divides and forge religious alliances. They are the groups who are least likely to respond to the political demands of the zealous on either side of the faith and ethnicity divide. It may be that the realities of the lives and choices made by the new *mohajabehs* mark the first steps towards a new multicultural national identity and cohesion' (Afshar, Aitken and Franks 2005, pp.278-9).

Such interventions in academic debates are important in helping to challenge racist stereotypes about Muslim identities in general and of the identities of Muslim women in particular. To further illustrate this, we draw from Tyrer's research with Muslim students during the war on terror. The data which follows was gathered as part of a European Social Fund supported project which ran from 2004-2006, and was undertaken by Tyrer, Fauzia Ahmad, Firsila Shah, Shehla Khan, Shaida Nabi, and Shayma Izzidien. Aspects of this work have been previously published in another version as Tyrer and Ahmad (2006). In this work, a considerable number of

respondents spoke of the problem of Islamophobia, with some describing this as a daily experience. The chief mode of experiencing this Islamophobia followed the logic of criminalization, with Muslims described as being an existentially threatening other:

Respondent: '…it may sound petty, it's nothing major – I've been called a "Paki" and like an "extremist". Like these kids once pointed at me and shouted "al Qaeda! She has a bomb"'''

While contemporary media and political coverage of the politics of hate focuses on the far-right, few respondents referred to the British National Party. This was not because they did not believe the far-right was racist, for there was certainly an implicit awareness of its threat, but rather, because they were recognizing that the extremist interlocutions of anti-Muslim racism were drawing from hegemonic ideas, such as those expressed during the war on terror, which were held far more widely in society than among just the racist far right. Responses emphasized the role of the state and media in drawing these boundaries which marked Muslims as 'other' and 'extremist'.

A number of respondents spoke directly of the discursive dimensions of this racism, by using phrases which referred directly to such problems as being expected to use 'loaded language' against themselves. This reflected a context in which Muslim identities are problematised as deviant and subversive, and of how the hegemonic ways of speaking about Muslim identities often involve interrogating the loyalty and Britishness of Muslims in the face of suspicion. But to some respondents, this locked

them into an automatic face-off and series of ascribed racial labels, which contrasted with the sense of agency and individual identity which they claimed they got from a Muslim identity:

Respondent: 'I wouldn't perceive myself to be Pakistani but other people would...I'd describe my identity by my religion really, because it doesn't matter where you are or what you are doing because you will always be what your faith is'

Respondent: 'Just as an individual really. Not as a British and not as a Pakistani. Just as a Muslim.'

Muslimness was not posited as a rejection of being Asian, but rather as a rejection of ascribed essentialist constructions of what race meant in hegemonic discourse which historically involved problematic constructions of minority identities. In turn, respondents identified important questions about the politics of identity and identification as an important means of combating the racist ideas which they encountered in a range of contexts:

Respondent: I did my degree in Social Policy and...we looked at inequality and equality, so when I looked at those subjects it did make me think 'what does it mean?' But I mean identity is one of them things where you don't sit there and go 'what am I? Who am I?'...you just define yourself as the person that you are from experience that you've had and not the colour of your skin. You might do, but that might be because of an event or something such as you go into an all-white area and someone calls you a 'Paki', you know...I mean, that's what might lead you to thinking about things like

that or reading about them things, like 'all these Asian people that are between two cultures', you know? Like it's a big deal, almost like it's restraining or negative and I think that's always extremely negative whereas I don't see myself torn between anything...I don't sit there and go, 'oh, I'm Pakistani', 'I'm British', 'oh, I'm British Pakistani'. What does that mean? Am I torn between two cultures? I don't think like that'

To respondents, it was not a matter of buying into essentialist ideas about race but rather recognizing the contingency of race, and challenging it. Respondents noted the important peer support which was provided by their contact with other Muslims and structures such as student Islamic societies, in spite of the ways in which they are frequently stereotyped as indicative of Muslim insularity and self-segregation. Thus, respondents contested the terms on which they were being racialised as 'alien', 'criminal', and 'self-segregating', and emphasised their Muslimness as something which preserved their individual identities in the face of the totalising and dehumanising effects of racism:

Respondent: 'Islam is not eradicating tradition and culture at all and neither does it condemn it...it sees everybody as who they are, whether they are Black, white, from America, Africa, wherever. It doesn't matter, and that's what brings diversity'.

So, in contrast to 'nation' which was associated with racist exclusions and the deviantisation of Muslims during the war on terror, and in contrast to traditional markers of racial difference, respondents found through their expression of Muslim identities ways of articulating inclusive notions of Muslimness which rejected racial

logics and race-based exclusions. This idealism constituted an important form of resistance in the face of a process which slowly sought to criminalise Islamic Societies as spaces of self-exclusion, radicalization, and criminalization.

Afshar, Haleh, Aitken, Rob & Franks, Myfanwy (2005), 'Feminisms, Islamophobia and Identities', *Political Studies*, 53, pp.262-283

Bilge, Sirma (2010), 'Beyond Subordination vs. Resistance: An Intersectional Approach to the Agency of Veiled Muslim Women', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31(1), February 2010, pp.9-28

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Tyrer, David (2011), ''Flooding the embankments': Race, Bio-Politics and Sovereignty', in eds. S Sayyid and AK Vakil, *Thinking Through Islamophobia*, London: Hurst and Co., pp.93-110