Article:

Charlie Hebdo special issue

Muslims, racism and violence after the Paris attacks

ABSTRACT

The aim of this short article is to consider ways in which violence, and the threat of it, is integral to the lived experience of Muslims. The article reflects on how violence is intrinsic to forms of racism and explores how it features in the study of racism as it relates to Muslims. In doing so, it briefly examines similarities between forms of racialisation experienced by Muslims and Jews and draws attention to how, in the wake of the Paris attacks, resulting fear and insecurity shape the routine, day-to-day lives of both Jewish and Muslim people. The article focuses on the multi-faceted ways in which experiencing violence is a key component of Muslims' everyday lives, in contrast to dominant narratives characterising Muslims as perpetrators of violence. It argues that exploring the threat and experience of violence, and its effects, is an important part of sociological endeavour to understand and explain the position of Muslims in European societies. (160 words)

Aside from the emergence of 'Je suis Charlie' as a rallying call in support of Charlie Hebdo and its commitment to promoting and protecting freedom of speech, a key response to the Paris attacks was the drawing of media and public attention to how violence, and the threat of it, continues to shape the lived experience of European Jews. The murder of a police officer close to a Jewish school in the district of Montrouge and the subsequent murder of four Jewish people at the Hyper Cacher kosher supermarket led to an increase in security in France and other European countries to protect Jewish schools and places of worship from anti-Semitic attacks. The 70th anniversary of the liberation of

Auschwitz, three weeks later, provided a timely, enduring reminder of how violence is integral to forms of racism, as is the fear and insecurity engendered as a result. The overall aim of this short article is to draw attention to how the reported increase in fear and insecurity among Jewish people as a consequence of the attacks is, in key respects, shared by Muslims, whilst providing a reminder that fear and insecurity is part of the routine, lived experience of both groups.

This aim is, on the face of it, anomalous given that the Paris attacks were perpetrated by individuals claiming to be acting in the name of Islam and included extreme acts of physical violence towards members of another religious minority group, the Jewish community. Shortly after the Paris attacks, two Muslim relatives of mine were threatened at knife point and robbed as they were preparing to close their shop, a small business that they run together. Although they sustained only minor physical injuries, the emotional harm to them and their children, who witnessed the robbery, has been considerable and is likely to be long-lasting. Together, the robbery and the Paris attacks prompted me to reflect on, first, the different ways in which violence, and the threat of it, is integral to the lived experience of European Muslims and, second, the infrequency with which Muslims are portrayed as victims of violence. The article reflects these two concerns with a focus on how violence features in the study of racism as it relates to Muslims. It draws attention to the importance of placing the threat and experience of violence, and its effects, at the centre of sociological endeavour to understand and explain the position of Muslims in European societies and, in doing so, to consider how violence features in Muslims' everyday, lived experience.

Violence, Racism and Islamophobia

The study of violence has been largely absent from sociological theory, even though violence is embedded in the social fabric in multiple ways (Ray 2011:2). Despite this absence, it is recognised that violence is integral to racism and takes two distinctive, yet inextricably inter-related forms. To briefly summarise, the first, symbolic violence, is the outcome of what Stuart Hall (1997) called a 'racialised regime of representation' that operates to fix and naturalise a range of characteristics and reduce people to a few essentialised, disparaging features. The second, physical violence, incorporates a range of social action, from abuse and

harassment to coercion and assault, that threatens physical and/or mental health and well-being. Although the two can be considered distinct for analytical purposes, one is implicated in the other and both are clearly instrumental to the operation of power relations that underpins forms of racism (Hall 1997). Sociologists studying racism maintain a central focus on the exercise of symbolic violence in order to explain what racism is and how ideas about different, apparently discrete groups of people operate to exclude, marginalise and oppress (e.g. Bulmer and Solomos 1999; Goldberg 1990; Miles and Brown 2003,). A key task of theorists of racism is therefore to explain how symbolic violence produces forms of racialised knowledge about different groups and how this knowledge then relates to physical violence.

With respect to Muslims, the task for theorists of racism is challenging because, unlike anti-Jewish narratives, anti-Muslim narratives are less straightforwardly viewed as having a racial point of reference (Goldberg 2006; Meer and Noorani 2008). Despite this, attention has been drawn to how cultural signifiers operate to homogenise and naturalise both Muslims and Jews and how this inter-twining of the cultural with the racial is particularly prevalent in contemporary Europe (Lentin and Titley 2011; Meer and Noorani 2008; Meer 2013). Likewise, since the late 1990s, the development of the concept of Islamophobia has been at the forefront of efforts to explain and account for forms of symbolic and physical violence towards Muslims (Halliday 1999; Allen 2010; Sayyid and Vakil 2010). Whilst it has contributed to critical reflection on the position of Muslim in European societies, perhaps inevitably, there remains a lack of consensus about what it is and how useful it is as a tool for understanding and challenging anti-Muslim sentiment (Sayyid and Vakil 2010). Leaving aside these debates, there have also been calls for the concept of racialisation to be extended to include Islamophobia, resulting in the constituting of Muslims as a distinct racialised group (Murji and Solomos 2005; Meer and Modood 2009; Meer 2013). This serves to promote understanding that, in the current social and political context, there is no simple separation between forms of violence towards Islam as a faith and forms of violence towards Muslims as a group of people. It also highlights a key similarity between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in that each operates to turn people who

identify with or are identified by their religion into dangerous racialised 'others' (Klug 2003; Lentin and Titley 2011).

Symbolic violence after the Paris attacks

One consequence of the Paris attacks has been to reinvigorate dominant narratives of Muslims as disloyal and dangerous citizens, challenging national laws and values and threatening peace and security. This is to be expected given that Muslims are said to face a 'hegemonic bloc of hostility' that is derived from a wide range of sources, including the state and media (Werbner 2005). Together these sources operate to sustain a symbolic order that places Muslims, as a group, in direct, inevitable opposition to the liberal freedoms and values of secular European societies (Fekete 2004, 2009; Kundnani 2007; Modood 1990). The operation of symbolic violence, fundamental to racism, occurs as a result of unequal relationships of power that enable and legitimise representation of Muslims in these ways. It is one example illustrating how many of the different modalities of violence, whether individual or collective, are not necessarily criminal.

Symbolic violence is evident in the coercive attention and criticism directed towards Muslims as a whole, who are held accountable for the actions of a few. This was shown to be the case following other terrorist attacks, including 9 September 2001, and it was again evident following the attacks in Paris (Spalek 2002). Claiming 'Je suis Charlie' became almost obligatory following the attacks, requiring people generally, and Muslims specifically, to choose between being for the magazine or for the terrorists (Ali 2015). This served to silence dissenting voices of both Muslims and non-Muslims who, for example, took issue with the dominant argument that people have an absolute right to insult whoever they wish. Similarly, The Muslim Council of Britain criticised a letter from the government's communities secretary asking Muslim leaders to explain and demonstrate how faith in Islam can be part of British identity (Deardon 2015). Although arguably a well-intentioned intervention, the letter served to reinforce dominant understanding of Muslims as a homogenous, problematic group who do not straightforwardly share the values of the rest of 'us'. The UKIP leader Nigel Farage's much criticised remarks that a 'fifth column' in European society was responsible for the attacks, and similar comments regarding the apparent problem

of the encroachment of Sharia law, constitute Muslims as a significant internal threat, which negate the reality of the position of Muslims as a marginalised group (Holehouse 2015). These are high profile examples from public figures, yet the operation of symbolic violence suggests that they are indicative of post-attack social commentary on what is to be done about the apparent entrenched 'problem' of Muslims in European societies. They contribute to an immediate social and political context which reinforces and extends the marking of Muslims as a distinct, dangerous group.

Muslims as victims of hate crime

Studies of domestic violence highlight how violence is bound up with everyday life in complex ways (Ray 2011:3). Likewise, racist violence underscores how violence permeates the everyday, although it rarely conforms to the dominant image of hate crime due to the complex motivation driving it (Ray, Smith and Wastell 2004). Hate crime is one indicator of how physical violence, and the threat of it, is central to forms of racism and is defined as 'any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic' (Creese and Lader,2014:4). With regards to Muslims' experiences of hate crime, it is telling that a Home Office report showed a 5 per cent increase in overall hate crime in England and Wales between 2012/13 and 2013/14 and concluded that this was likely to be due to the increase in the number of racially and religiously aggravated offences in the immediate period following the murder of the soldier Lee Rigby in May 2013 (Creese and Lader 2014:7). The Metropolitan Police reported an increase in Islamophobic hate crime in the wake of the murder and a 45 per cent increase in religious hate crime in the same period overall (Creese and Lader 2014:9). It is reasonable to suggest that the Paris attacks may result in a similar increase. In addition, the number and range of incidents recorded by the Tell MAMA project, a public service for measuring and monitoring ant-Muslim attacks, also provide evidence of how physical violence is part of the everyday lived experience of Muslims in Britain (<tellmamauk.org>).

    In February 2015, shortly after the Paris attacks, three Muslim students were murdered in the US as a result of what police said was a dispute over

parking. The response on social media drew attention to the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in labelling any criminal offence a hate crime (Katz 2015). Leaving aside arguments for and against designating this particular case a hate crime, it provided a reminder, in the wake of the Paris attacks, that hate crime towards Muslims is likely to be under-recorded and can be misrepresented. Criticism on social media focused on the lack of coverage of the murders by mainstream media, drawing attention to how a racialised double standard appears to come into play when Muslims are victims, rather than perpetrators, of crime. Cases of hate crime involving Muslims who are killed by non-Muslims are thought to be less newsworthy than those involving non-Muslims who are killed by Muslims, leading to the conclusion that Muslim lives are seen as of less value. A comparable example in the UK is that of Mohammed Saleem, an elderly Muslim man who was stabbed and killed in an attack that was motivated by racial hatred as he walked home from evening prayers at his local mosque. The man convicted of his murder had also planted three bombs outside of local mosques (Dodd 2013). The attack took place less than a month before the murder of Lee Rigby and, in comparison, received relatively little media attention. There are important differences between the two cases and, whilst it is essential not to overstate similarities, comparisons drawn between them again raised questions about the relative perceived value of Muslim lives and the apparent lack of attention drawn to violence experienced by Muslims.

The production of racialised knowledge helps to explain why Muslims lives are seen to lack value because it presupposes and constitutes power relations so that dominant representations of Muslims as problematic and dangerous defenders of a backward religion remain unchallenged (Foucault 1977). Principal representations of Muslims as perpetrators of violence are not easily reconciled with examples of Muslims as victims and, as a result, the loss of Muslim lives is less likely to attract public attention and sympathy. The notable exception is when Muslims are victims of violence perpetrated by other Muslims. Dominant representations are neatly reinforced by violence carried out by Muslims and the symbiotic relationship between symbolic and physical violence is evident because physical violence towards Muslims is readily justified and legitimised.

Muslims and the wider everyday threat and experience of violence

Beyond violence categorised as hate crime, it is relevant to reflect on ways in which the fear and experience of violence shapes the more general everyday lives of Muslims. I was recently involved in developing a research project with community engagement officers and representatives of community groups in Rotherham, a town that has been the focus of sustained media and public attention due to a child sexual exploitation scandal involving local Pakistani Muslim men. As a result, it has also been the focus of sustained activity by Far Right groups (Faith Matters 2014). I collected emails and notes from meetings that document the impact of the scandal on local Muslims in relation to the everyday threat and experience of violence. As is to be expected, this includes direct experiences of harassment and abuse in the street, incidents that can be categorised as hate crime. Yet what is particularly striking is how local Muslims report feeling unsafe and insecure in their local neighbourhood, to the extent that they have adopted avoidance and management strategies, involving changing their everyday practices, and those of their children. This provides a small, yet revealing, indication of how fear and insecurity arising from the threat of violence affects and shapes routine, lived experience.

Apart from immediate contextual factors, the likelihood of experiencing forms of violence is dependent on a range of inter-related factors, such as socio-economic circumstances, age and gender, as well as ethnicity and religion. To consider another example in which the intersectionality of these various factors is relevant, in Britain, Muslims are concentrated in some of the most deprived wards and experience multiple forms of deprivation (Peach 2006:649-50). Research evidence has shown that Muslims also experience particularly harsh disadvantage in the labour market (Platt 2005; Khattab 2009; Khattab *et al*. 2011).The extent to which Muslims experience this disadvantage varies according to ethnic background, with Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, numerically the largest group of Muslims in Britain, the most disadvantaged (Platt 2005; Khattab 2009; Khattab *et al*. 2011). The reasons for this are complex and, whilst there is no room to consider them here, it is pertinent to reflect on the forms of employment and self-employment that are a consequence of and response to labour market disadvantage. The type

of resulting labour market activity that some Muslims engage in includes owning and/or working in small businesses, such as take-aways, restaurants and local convenience stores, as well as other forms of self-employment, such as taxi driving and market trading. This kind of employment activity increases the risk of exposure to hate crime and other forms of violence due to risks related to direct interaction with members of the general public, usually outside of more affluent, better-policed retail and leisure centres and as part of the night time economy. My relatives' experience of violence is an example here as is my memory of a research project that I carried out some years ago in which I learned of Muslim taxi drivers who had a warning system in place to come to each other's assistance in the event of violence from passengers. Whether such violence can be categorised as hate crime or not, these examples suggest that the precarious labour market situation experienced by Muslims results in labour market activity that increases exposure to violence in everyday working life. It is another small, pertinent example of how violence impacts on Muslims' everyday life in multi-faceted ways.

Concluding thoughts

The attacks in Paris drew media and public attention to how violence, and the threat of it, continues to shape the lived experience of European Jews, whilst there was little attention paid to how the threat and experience of violence, and its effects, is also part of the everyday, lived experience of European Muslims. This article has reflected on the operation of symbolic and physical violence, with respect to Muslims, both in the wake of the Paris attacks and more generally. In doing so, it has shown how violence is related to the overall position of Muslims in European societies, particularly but not solely as a racialised group. It has focused on a small number of, mainly UK-focused, examples from the everyday lives of Muslims in order to highlight how the threat and experience of violence is encountered on a mundane, routine basis. One notable omission is that the article has not examined forms of violence perpetrated by the state. These are usually portrayed as legitimate in relation to national concerns regarding security and defence and have considerable, far-reaching consequences in terms of engendering fear and insecurity among Muslims and are, understandably, a sustained focused of attention (e.g. Fekete 2004, 2009; Kapoor 2013; Kundnani 2007). Another omission

is the activities of Far Right groups. Both are crucial to providing a comprehensive picture of Muslims' experiences of violence.

Paying attention to symbolic and physical forms of violence, and the close, dynamic relationship between them, is essential in understanding the position of Muslims in European societies. It is imperative that theorists continue to focus on the operation of symbolic violence in order to explain and understand widespread anti-Muslim sentiment, and this endeavour can be enhanced by the findings of empirical research that interrogates how different modalities of violence impact on the everyday, routine lives of Muslims. Such research makes good sociological sense in the wake of the Paris attacks and is particularly important in helping to counteract dominant racialised understanding of Muslims as perpetrators of violence.

References

ALI, T (2015) 'It didn't need to be done', *London Review of Books* (5 February 2015), http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n03/tariq-ali/it-didnt-need-to-be-done (accessed 25 March 2015).

ALLEN, C (2010) *Islamophobia*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.

BULMER, M and Solomos, J (eds) (1999)*Racism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

CREESE, B And Lader, D (2014) *Hate Crimes, England and Wales, 2013/14*, Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Crown Copyright.

DEARDEN, L (2015) 'David Cameron says anyone criticising Eric Pickles' letter to Muslims 'really has a problem'', *The Independent*, (19 January 2015), http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/david-cameron-says-anyone-criticising-eric-pickles-letter-to-muslims-really-has-a-problem-9987397.html (Accessed 27 February 2015).

DODD, V (2013) 'Ukranian man charged with 'terrorist-related murder' of Mohammed Salim', *The Guardian*, (22 July 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/13/us/chapel-hill-north-carolina-mourns-death-of-three-muslim-students.html?_r=0 (Accessed 27 February 2015).

FAITH MATTERS (2014) *Facebook Report: Rotherham, hate and the far-right online*, Faith Matters.

FEKETE, L (2004), 'Anti-Muslim racism and the European security state' Race and Class, Vol. 46, No. 1, p.3–29.

FEKETE L (2009) *A Suitable Enemy: Racism, Migration and Islamophobia in Europe,* London: Pluto Press.

FOUCAULT, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish*, London: Tavistock.

GOLDBERG, D.T (2006) 'Racial Europeanization', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, p.331–364.

GOLDBERG, D.T (ed) (1990) *The Anatomy of Racism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

HALL, S (1997) 'The Spectacle of the 'Other' in S. Hall (ed) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage.

HALLIDAY, F (1999) 'Islamophobia'reconsidered', *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* Vol. 22:, p.892–902.

HOLEHOUSE, M (2015) 'Nigel Farage blames Paris attack on 'rather gross policy of multiculturalism', *The Telegraph*, (8 January 2015), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/nick-clegg/11332461/Nigel-Farage-blames-Paris-attack-on-rather-gross-policy-of-multi-culturalism.html (Accessed 27 Febuary 2015).

KAPOOR, N (2013) 'On the North West 10 (12): Postcoloniality, the British racial state and the war on terror', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, Vol. 20, No.1, p.61-76.

KATZ, J.M (2015) 'Funeral for Muslims killed in Chapel Hill draws thousands', The New York Times, (12 February 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/13/us/chapel-hill-north-carolina-mourns-death-of-three-muslim-students.html?_r=0 (Accessed 27 February 2015).

KHATTAB, N (2009) 'Ethno-religious background as a determinant of education and occupational attainment in Britain', *Sociology*, Vol. 43, No.2, p.304-22.

KHATTAB, N, Johnston, R, Modood, T.and Sirkeci, I (2011) 'Economic activity in the South-Asian population in Britain: the impact of ethnicity, religion, and class', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 34, No.9, p.1466-1481.

KLUG, B (2003) 'The collective Jew: Israel and the new anti-Semitism', *Patterns of Prejudice,* Vol. 37, No.2, p.117–138.

KUNDNANI, A (2007) *The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21st Century Britain*, London: Pluto Press.

LENTIN, A And Titley, G (2011) *The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age*, London: Zed Books.

MEER, N (2013) 'Racialization and religion: Race, culture and difference in the study of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3, p.385-398.

MEER, N And Modood, T (2010) in S. Sayyid and A.K. Vakil (eds), *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives*, London: Hurst and Company.

MEER, N And Modood, T (2009) 'Refutations of the "Muslim question", *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 43, No. 3/4, p.332-351.

MEER, N And Noorani, T (2008) 'A sociological comparison of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain', *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 56, No.2, p.195-219.

MILES, R and Brown, M (2003) *Racism*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge.

MODOOD, T (1990), 'British Asians and the Salman Rushdie affair', *Political Quarterly*, reprinted in J. Donald and A. Rattansi, (1992) (eds), 'Race', Culture and Difference, London: Sage.

MURJI, K and Solomos, J (2005) *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

PEACH, C (2006) 'Muslims in the 2001 Census if England and Wales: Gender and Economic Disadvantage', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 4, p629-55.

PLATT, L (2005) *Migration and Social Mobility: The Life Chances of Britain's Minority Ethnic Communities*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

RAY, L (2011) *Violence and Society*, London: Sage Publications Ltd.

RAY, L, Smith, D and Wastell, L (2004) 'Shame, Rage and Racist Violence', *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 44, p.350-368.

 SAYYID, S and VAKIL, A.K (eds) (2010) *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives*, London: Hurst and Company.

SPALEK, B (2002) 'Hate Crimes Against British Muslims in the Aftermath of September 11th', *Criminal Justice Matters*, Vol. 48, No. 1, p.20-2.

WERBNER, P (2005), 'Islamophobia: incitement to religious hatred – legislating for a new fear?' *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 21, No. 1, p.5-9.