

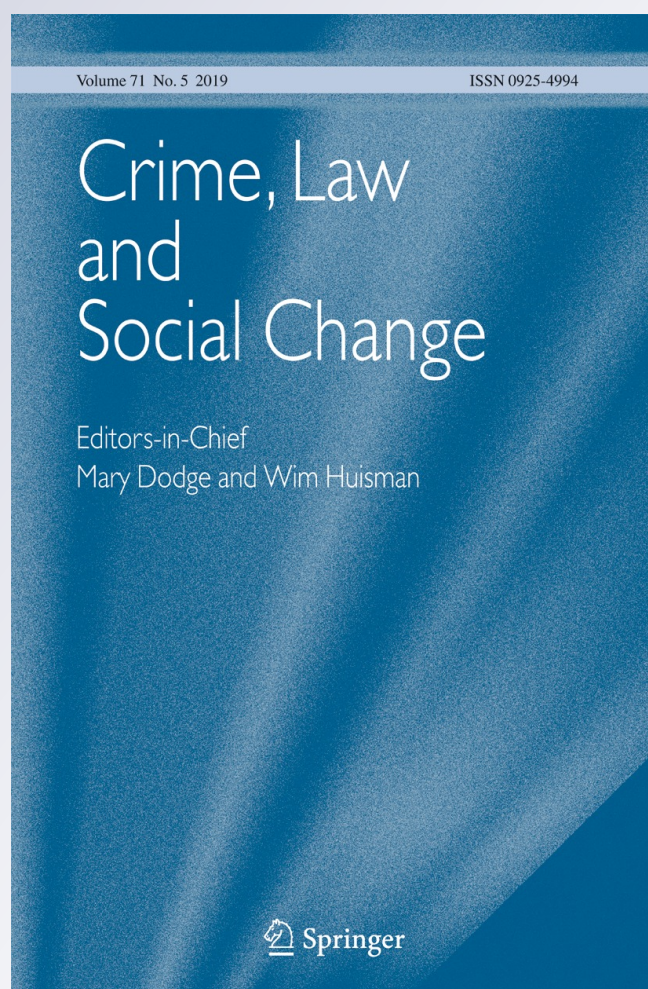
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British Muslims perceptions of social cohesion: from multiculturalism to community cohesion and the ‘war on terror’

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Abstract

Since the Northern disturbances of 2001 and the terrorist attacks of September 11th the UK government has changed the focus of policies from those that predominantly focused on British Muslims’ Asian identity, to those that focus on British Muslims’ religious identity. The fracturing of the Asian identity has been evident in the political discourses on the ‘war on terror’ and community cohesion, with both defining British Muslims through their religious identity, as opposed to their Asian identity, an identity for which inter Asian commonality existed. This article draws on research that was conducted on British Muslims’ perceptions of social policy since the 1980s and explores the extent to which changes in governmental policies have impacted British Muslims’ perceptions of commonality with non-British Muslims. The article demonstrates how the ‘war on terror’ and community cohesion are negatively impacting social cohesion through making British Muslims feel isolated and marginalised in society. The implications of the findings are discussed in relation to the radicalisation of British Muslims and the growing influence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Keywords Muslims · Multiculturalism · Community cohesion · War on terror

Introduction

This section explores how the Northern disturbances of 2001 and the terrorist attacks of September 11th changed the governmental policies and discourses associated with British Muslims. Prior to the inception of community cohesion, multiculturalism was the framework for minority communities. Multiculturalism promoted a sense of inclusion through supporting minority groups [33, 39, 44] and although as Meer and

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Modood [40] note, multiculturalism has a contested meaning, in its most general sense it advocates ethnic, cultural and religious differences being positively embraced. Multiculturalism marked the institutionalisation of the protection of cultural, ethnic, religious and racial groups from discrimination [34, 42]. According to Parekh [45], within this framework the national identity should be defined in ‘politico-institutional rather than ethnocultural terms’ so that minority groups are not excluded because of their different ethnic identities. Although British Muslims were predominantly defined through their ethnocultural identity, events such as the Rushdie Affair did bring British Muslims’ religious identity into the public domain [30, 36].

British Muslims’ religious identity became increasingly prominent in 2001 when disturbances took place in the Northern cities of Oldham, Bradford and Burnley. The main report into the disturbances, the Cattle report was published after the events of September 11th and this led to a greater media focus and interest in the report [41]. Following the report, the government introduced community cohesion as the new framework for citizenship. Community cohesion defined a cohesive community as ‘having a common vision and shared sense of belonging’ ([57], p. 7) and highlighted the need for a national identity that was based on shared values. According to Rietveld [49], ‘the relationship between multiculturalism and national identity is presented as a balance between diversity and unity or cohesion’. Within community cohesion, the tension between diversity and unity was resolved through diversity being compromised and citizens being expected to assimilate to what Fekete [21] calls, monoculturalism. Community cohesion was not only a theoretical policy, but one which institutionalised mechanisms such as citizenship tests, integration contracts and compulsory courses on ‘national values’ to secure unity within a shared national identity. It has been argued that these mechanisms facilitated the securitisation of the state through conceptualising the main threat to social cohesion as being the lack of integration by minority groups [15, 21, 35]. Such a construction dismissed institutional racism and discrimination as barriers to integration, thereby concealing the pervasive and detrimental impact of structural racism in British Muslims’ daily lives.

The governmental change in policy from multiculturalism to community cohesion has received much academic attention, with research by Moosavi [43] concluding that although ministers have celebrated multiculturalism and diversity, they have also been ‘critical of it for preventing ‘community cohesion’’. The dominant rhetoric of the then Labour government and subsequent coalition government was to blame multiculturalism for segregation, communities living ‘parallel lives’ and societal ills ([13]; [48]). Multiculturalism was also criticised for encouraging British Muslims to ‘separate themselves and live by their own values, resulting in extremism and, ultimately, the fostering of a mortal home-grown terrorist threat’ ([32], p. 26). Within this context, the construction of the British Muslim community as suspect [27, 38] led to the implementation of policies in which British Muslims were stereotyped as problematic [29], leading to the term ‘Asian’ ceasing to have much content as a political category’ ([42], p. 187). The problematisation and the growing securitisation of British Muslims, as evident through the reduction of rights and freedom of British Muslims when compared to other communities [37] meant that emphasis was taken off real issues, such as racism and the growth of the far right [1].

According to Castles [15], ‘multiculturalism and the ‘war on terror’ could not co-exist as government policies’. The ‘war on terror’ accelerated many of the concepts embedded

in community cohesion. British Muslims were stigmatised and seen as a threat, thus legitimising the securitisation of the state through the policies of Prevent and community cohesion [1, 40]. According to research by Alam and Husband [1], these two policies identified British Muslim communities as ‘a threat to the British way of life’. A new discourse on British Muslims emerged whereby ministers singled ‘Muslims out as inferior and in need of being civilised’, they were associated with terrorism, fundamentalism and extremism and this new discourse, through highlighting their religious identity separated them from other minorities (also see [2] for a larger discussion of the construction on the war on terror discourse). ([43], p. 9). Within this context, British identity became increasingly defined in monolithic terms and subject to a mass process of social construction in which Britain was a victim and the erosion of civil liberties was a necessity for self-preservation [24]. According to research by Moosavi [43], ‘ministers often suggested that Britishness is best summed up as being about justice/the rule of law, tolerance, fairness, democracy and freedom/liberty’. However as Kundnani [32] rightly states, many of these values have been hugely undermined in the ‘war on terror’. Thus, as Sivanandan [52] argues, ‘the immigrant is no longer just a classical outsider but also the terrorist within’. According to Hussain [27], such a construction was purposeful because British Muslims could only be questioned about loyalty and belonging if they were constructed as a ‘homogenous group’. The dual policies therefore changed the discourses associated with British Muslims.

The ‘war on terror’ has intensified the focus on British Muslims, and within this context it has been claimed that Islamophobia reaches ‘the highest levels of government[s] ([16], p. 41) with governmental policies actually contributing to the existence of Islamophobia in society ([1]; [56]). Islamophobia involves a distinction between drawn between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and this has implications for understandings and perceptions of group identity [1]. Within the ‘war on terror’, the deterioration of the relationship between British Muslims and the state, and understandings and expressions of group identity on the national level and the international level have implications for the radicalisation process. International visits to countries including Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia and Afghanistan have been recognised as contributing to the radicalisation of British Muslims [19, 50]. Within this interplay between the geopolitical level and protecting UK security, Syria is a grave concern in its capacity to radicalise British Muslims [19]. From a security point of view, the threat of terrorism is far greater given that a terrorist profile does not exist, and the government therefore attempts to reduce and control established factors which are relevant to the radicalisation process [17, 25]. The factors identified include age, as just over two-thirds of all terrorist offences since 2001 have been committed by those under 30 [25], and the ‘overseas’ aspect has been identified as a huge factor in the process of radicalisation. According to Prevent ([47], p. 37) ‘many people from this country who have been radicalised have travelled overseas and during that time have met and been influenced by extremist or terrorist organisations: their travel is part of the radicalisation process’.

Perceived grievances and perceptions of injustice have also been highlighted as factors which are relevant to the radicalisation process [47] and the government is instrumental in the existence of such perceptions (see [4, 5]). It is vital to explore how governmental policies are shaping understandings of group identity and possibly reducing perceptions of commonality and unity with non-Muslims. It is also important to have a deeper understanding of the impact of policies such as community cohesion

and Prevent, which through predominantly focusing on British Muslims, have contributed to perceptions of injustice and grievances amongst British Muslims. This paper presents research conducted on British Muslims' perceptions of governmental policies to assess the cumulative impact of the change from multiculturalism to community cohesion. Attention is paid to how the changes in policies impacted perceptions and understandings of group identity, and the extent to which these changes in policy have impacted British Muslims' perceptions of commonality with non-Muslims.

Methodology

State policy towards British Muslims has changed considerably over recent decades with multiculturalism and community cohesion representing two very different approaches to social cohesion. The aim of the research was to explore British Muslims' perceptions of these changes and the impact of these changes.

The research population was British Pakistani / Kashmiri Muslims in Birmingham. 32 British Muslims were interviewed using a semi structured interview format. It is acknowledged that not all Muslims are Pakistani or Kashmiri and therefore the research does not seek to generalise beyond this group. Birmingham was selected because it has a large Pakistani / Kashmiri Muslim population and has been the focus of raids and surveillance under counter terrorism legislation. All interviews were conducted during Labour's third term in government (which started in 2005) and prior to the Conservative / Liberal Democrat coalition government. The data is still highly relevant because the two governmental policies of community cohesion and Prevent, which were introduced during this period remain part of the current governmental social cohesion and counter terrorism strategies.

Participants were recruited via a snowballing sampling strategy. Given the sensitive nature of the research, this sampling strategy allowed individuals to base their decision to participate on the experiences of individuals they knew had participated in the research. Participants were given a consent form which covered confidentiality, anonymity and participants right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. Having transcribed the interviews, participants names were removed and replaced with pseudonyms to preserve anonymity. Each participant was interviewed twice, once retrospectively for their perceptions of multiculturalism and once prospectively, for their perceptions of community cohesion, so a total of 64 interviews were conducted. The use of retrospective interviews and prospective interviews served the analytical purpose of enabling direct comparisons to be made. In the retrospective interviews, questions were asked in the past tense and in the prospective interviews, questions were asked in the present tense.

Retrospective interviewing involves participants being asked to reflect on previous perceptions, beliefs and experiences which could in fact be shaped by contemporary perceptions. Life history / oral history methods also involve participants being retrospective through discussing and sharing earlier periods of their life. Bryman [12] states that the strength of such an approach is that the emphasis is on participant's lives and there is 'a clear commitment to the processual aspects of social life, showing how events unfold and interrelate in people's lives'. The conducted research was similar to research conducted by Hood and Joyce [23] which asked participants to reflect on their changing perceptions of crime and social change in London, and research by Sin [51],

which explored ethnic minority's changing experiences of racism. Thompson [54] argues that nearly all social science involves memory and memories incorporate reality. Therefore, although there are problems associated with using data based on participants' memories, there are also great benefits of using such data, especially when we consider how memories form individual's ontological reality and thus their 'truth'.

During the interviews, participants often made reference to earlier periods of their life and in this way the interviews were like the life story method which 'invites the subject to look back in detail across his or her entire life course' ([12], p. 322). A similar approach to that which was used by Hood and Joyce [23] was used, 'we took care to ask respondents to concentrate on the particular period of their life we were investigating; to elicit narratives..... to situate their accounts in the broader context of social relations, activities and structures'. The interviews were analysed using grounded theory which meant that although core categories and themes could emerge, leading to a higher level of theoretical abstraction, the categories and themes could still be traced back to the data from which they emerged. The next section explores the main themes to emerge in relation to participants' perceptions of state policy before and after the introduction of community cohesion and the terrorist attacks of September 11th (also see [3, 4, 5] for research process of the study).

From the death of multiculturalism to community cohesion

There were vast differences between the retrospective data and the prospective data in terms of how participants perceived state policies and the construction of their identities within these policies. During the retrospective period, state policies were perceived through participants' ethnic identity and their British identity. A common theme to emerge was perceptions of New Labour providing services and introducing policies which focused on issues such as deprivation and poverty, as Safia, a 26 year old woman suggests.

New Labour came in and I thought it was a change. I think they had started to look at closing the gap; they started to look at cycles of deprivation and social exclusion, how if you lived in the worse wards you were more likely to get the worse education and get the worse jobs. So it was all about solutions and joining up problems.

The existence of policies pertaining to deprivation and social exclusion strengthened perceptions of commonality through highlighting problems which cut across minority identities. It could therefore be argued that such policies were perceived as inclusive policies. Although the above policies were perceived as highlighting participants' British identity, minority specific policies were also positively perceived, as Matloob, a 35 year old man describes.

The government were very good with the Asian community, in the health centres, in the hospitals, in the school, everywhere. The government made it possible for us to integrate and fit in. I felt like this country was my home and people were not scared of differences, they respected differences.

Interestingly, and in stark contrast to the prospective data, the retrospective data showed how the government was mainly perceived in terms of services. For example, New Labour was perceived as providing services based on empowering ethnic minorities, as Sophina, a 25 year old woman states.

The government was not pushing people to integrate but giving them opportunities to form their own support groups and be self productive.

The government was also recognised as providing language classes and courses to improve social mobility. These services were perceived as positively embracing participants' ethnic / cultural identities, rather than mechanisms through which participants were being made to assimilate.

During the retrospective interviews, participants narrated their perceptions and experiences through their ethnic identity and their British identity and thus the identities which were the focus of state policies. Many participants used words like 'our' and 'we' to denote their British identity, as the following quote by Shafquat, a 26 year old man highlights (see [3] for a discussion on identities, belonging and attachment).

I was enjoying school and college with New Labour coming in. In the 90's there was a difference, a difference that there was freedom. Things changed in the 90's, I really remember the 90's, economically it was booming, internet technology was advancing, we were experiencing a really exciting time. You could do what you wanted and that was a result of the government, we were allowed to do what we wanted as of when, and I guess you can see that people in other countries did not have that but our government provided that for us.

The state determines which identities should be the focus of policy and to what extent rights should exist for these identities. Therefore, the state construction of identities influences inclusion and / or exclusion [28]. Participants believed that they were constructed according to their Asian identity and conceptualised their Asian identity as an identity which encompassed other religious groups, such as Sikhs and Hindus as Zara, a 42 year old woman explains.

And every now and then you would have a drama on TV about an Asian woman who is going to be forced to marry and it wasn't going to work out, and she wanted to marry someone who was white. If it was the media or the government we were seen as Asian.

To further highlight the lack of emphasis of social policy on religious identity, when asked if the state should have provided protection against religious discrimination, participants cited wanting such legislation due to equality, rather than wanting the legislation because their religious identity was being demonised, as the following quote by Sharfquat, a 26 year old man suggests.

Within this so-called democracy every person should have the right regardless of what religion and beliefs they have, to be protected.

The data is highly significant because the emphasis on equality suggests that it is essential that the state maintains equality and where principles of equality do exist, be it at the service level or the legislative level, then a shared sense of commonality is much more likely.

Research by Modood and Ahmad [42] revealed that British Muslims are pro-multiculturalism as long as it includes faith as a positive dimension of difference. Many participants felt that the state included their religious identity where services were concerned, as Sikander, a 35 year old man explains.

This government was approving state funded Islamic schools; some discrimination legislation actually did seem to suggest that this was a country that was not tolerant of racism. So I think in the first four or five years, there was a shift in positively funding activity around cohesion and working with respecting the rights of minority communities.

Where racism was concerned, the state was perceived as trying to maintain equality and encourage society to share a British identity but not at the expense of diversity. This can be seen when Blair [7] stated, 'Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and other faiths have a perfect right to their own identity and religion, to practice their faith and to conform to their culture. This is what multicultural, multi-faith Britain is about'. Such sentiments, which were espoused in multiculturalism led participants such as Nasrin, a 25 year old woman to have faith in the state.

There was this constant talk of multiculturalism and this concept was not only talked about but done so with a sense of proudness in the government, the media and everywhere really. It was felt that living in a country full of diversity was good, with every group having its rightful place and being appreciated.

During this period participants talked about how they associated freedom with their religious identity, as Matloob, a 35 year old man describes.

No a law wasn't needed because we could practice our religion, we could do more or less what we wanted. We could open up a mosque; we could open up a charity. There was a lot of easiness towards us and that was nice, it was like we belonged to this society. Like we were part of this society and society accepted us, we didn't feel like we were segregated and if I wanted to open a charity or help someone who is an orphan in a village back home, you know I didn't have a problem, I could do that.

A small minority of participants were critical of the state and although the positive perceptions heavily outweighed the negative perceptions, it is worth including the negative perceptions. There were some criticisms of measures to tackle institutional racism, as Nazim, a 31 year man describes.

The Commission of Racial Equality could have executed its power better and provided individuals with a lot more support and highlighted the ways in which it can assist ethnic minorities.

For some participants the Commission of Racial Equality was perceived as a tokenistic organisation, as were policies to encourage a more representative government. Although the state was generally seen as trying to eradicate racism through the introduction of anti-racism legislation, racism was still perceived in society, as the next quote by Sumerya, a 25 year old woman highlights.

It's when I was a teenager hanging around in the town centre a few old white men were sitting on the bench and they were like you half breed and that and I said I'm not a half breed, I'm a Paki so if you are going to call me something, call me what I am. I guess that was their way of being racist.

There was also a belief that the state could have done more to tackle societal racism through encouraging the police to investigate racism. Deutsch [20] states that relative deprivation is critical in stimulating dissatisfaction and 'the greater the magnitude of relative deprivation, the greater the sense of injustice that will be experienced by the oppressed'. Where negative perceptions of the state did exist, a great deal of inequality was not perceived, and this is because the state was not perceived to have failed the British Muslim community in particular, but all ethnic minorities, as the issues which participants felt the state could have improved on were issues that impacted all ethnic minorities. Therefore, it could be argued that had inequality been perceived through participants' religious identity, an identity for which inter minority commonality does not exist, then a greater sense of deprivation would have been perceived.

Community cohesion and the institutionalisation of the Muslim other

This section considers participants' perceptions of the state following the introduction of community cohesion. Interestingly, all participants believed that the state facilitated and contributed to the demonisation of Islam following the Northern disturbances and the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Sikander, a 35 year old man highlights how the demonisation of Islam was perceived as being state instigated, with the emergence of a vocabulary in which Islam was negatively constructed.

In my own little world that's called my mind, there is a conspiracy theory which says the people who are portraying Muslims the way they are being portrayed, with the hatred about Islam and the ideological beliefs of Islam, doesn't exactly translate to those who live on the estates of Kings Norton, they are just racist through ignorance. The language is ambiguous, on the one hand they are talking about the legislation to protect Muslims, on the other hand you have the terror raids and then you have the ministers and members of Parliament both from the government and opposition who are quite happy to go on national television and make statements that would have never been accepted before 9/11.

Wetherell [57] comments on how the categorisation of a community from an external agency has implications for how the community defines itself. The prospective data demonstrates how participants' religious identity became their primary identity, and unlike the retrospective data, where the state was generally perceived as bringing

equality and eradicating racism, in the prospective data the state was perceived as making Islamophobia legitimate and as giving far right groups legitimacy. Participants believed that the state had successfully created British Muslims as a separate entity to other minority groups through associating terrorism with Islam, as Sophia, a 30 year old woman explains.

After September 11th the government handled the attacks very well and there was an effort to try and separate the terrorists from Muslims. However, I think this was short lived and the separation did not happen.

Interestingly, when analysing speeches by politicians there is evidence to suggest that politicians did create a discourse in which Islam was associated with terrorism. For instance, Blair [8] said ‘the terrorists base their ideology on religious extremism – and not just any religious extremism, but a specifically Muslim version’. On another occasion he constructed Islam as being in direct opposition to British values saying, ‘it is a global fight about global values; it is about modernisation, within Islam and outside of it; it is about whether our value system can be shown to be sufficiently robust, true, principled and appealing that it beats theirs’ [9].

All participants explained how they believed their religious identity had been created as a separate category with inter commonality eradicated and been re-defined according to the ‘war on terror’ discourse. Interestingly, the state was not just perceived as creating a negative discourse around Islam, but it was also seen as creating an intra Muslim divide with those thought to be more religious, stereotyped as constituting a bigger threat, as Nabeela, a 50 year woman explains.

I think the government is just crap, they don’t know what they are doing, and they are inadequate. It’s a combination of the war and September 11th, foreign policy and there are other issues around as well. The government is placing all the emphasis on Muslims, saying Muslims should be doing this and they should be doing that, but it’s about stereotypes as well, and I think that is the biggest problem. Anyone with a beard or a hijab is seen as a threat which is just not true and it’s about stereotyping. The government has created a divide, before we were seen as Asian people but now we are seen as Muslims.

The connection between religious clothing and terrorism was actually made explicit with Harman [22] stating; the veil ‘is about radicalisation and solidarity with community. But I don’t want people to show solidarity by [wearing] something that prevents them taking their full role as women in society’. It could therefore be argued that the government effectively separated British Muslims from British Asian non-Muslims, and within the new discourse surrounding British Muslims, a hierarchy was constructed whereby characteristics, such as increased religiosity were created as characteristics that signify threat and risk. Following 9/11, differences were amplified and this acted to oppress British Muslims through inventing a ‘war on terror’ construction of their religious identity. Many participants believed that where institutional racism was concerned, the state was still concerned with eradicating racial and ethnic forms of racism. However, where racism against British Muslims was concerned, participants believed the state was institutionalising Islamophobia.

A strong discourse emerged in which British Muslims were not seen as integrating, with Blair [10] stating, ‘people want to know that the Muslim community in particular, but actually all minority communities, have got the balance right between integration and multiculturalism’. Segregation was predominantly seen as ‘a Muslim problem’ with Straw [53] arguing, ‘the trend towards greater segregation is most marked in some areas with large Asian, principally Muslim populations’. However, perhaps the most concerning part of this discourse was that British Muslims were constructed as being incompatible with and as a threat to British values, with Brown [11] stating, ‘for too long we overvalued what makes us different, it is time to also value what we believe in common a shared national purpose for our country’ and Kelly [31] arguing that young British Muslims should be encouraged ‘to identify and live by the shared British values of justice, peace and respect’. It was therefore strongly being suggested that British Muslims’ religious identity was stopping them from living according to British values.

Deutsch [20] states that civilised oppression emerges when the state enforces rules and procedures which regulate the social institutions of the society and produce inequality. All participants believed that after the Northern disturbances and September 11th, Islamophobia existed in all institutions, thus making the term civilized oppression relevant. State created policies and legislation were perceived as having created institutional Islamophobia and as participants described, as making institutions racist. This top down form of racism was also noted as being different to societal racism, as Jangir, a 21 year old man explains.

Now it has become more overt and the sophistication has been lost when you’ve got people like John Reid, some kind of thug inside the Home Office, and he’s coming out with stupid comments, and its increased in a bad way because now it’s a more sophisticated kind of racism, and that is a lot harder to fight.

The data reveals how participants perceived the state to have shaped the social meaning associated with their religious identity. Through institutionalising Islamophobia and creating structural inequality, participants believed the state had created British Muslims as being different and distinct to other minorities. All participants referred to and defined the state according to the power it has to introduce legislation and further, related the institutionalisation of Islamophobia predominantly to the criminal justice system. Many participants felt the that state had not only introduced legislation, which has produced concerns regarding human rights but also created an Islamophobic police force, as Nazar, a 44 year old man explains.

Since 9/11 things have changed, the government has changed its policies and views of Muslims. Through policy and legislation, the government has placed restrictions on Muslims and these have been rampant. I would say that the most destructive way in which they are being aggressive and now targeting all the Muslim community is through the police and this is making the force more racist towards Muslims.

When analysing speeches by politicians, terrorism was created as representing a huge threat and risk. For example, Blair [6] stated that the threat is ‘real and existential’ and needs to be fought ‘whatever the political cost’. The counter terrorism measures

introduced were aggressive and criticised by the House of Lords. ‘Since September 11th 2001 the Government has continuously justified many of its counter-terrorism measures on the basis that there is a public emergency threatening the life of the nation. We question whether the country has been in such a state for more than eight years. This permanent state of emergency inevitably has a deleterious effect on public debate about the justification for counter-terrorism measures’ [26]. Further, the threat and risk of terrorism was seen as being dispersed, with Clarke [18] stating ‘extremists can be found in training camps, in prisons, in bookshops, or in places of worship’. These quotes from politicians clearly highlight how terrorism was constructed. It was therefore not surprising to find that participants believed that this discourse shaped their interactions with British non-Muslims at the societal level. Participants believed that phrases like ‘enemy within’ and ‘mainstream society’ acted to not only represent the magnitude of the terrorist threat, but also led to the marginalisation and exclusion of British Muslims at the societal level. The demonisation of British Muslims was seen as leading to a complete curtailment of human rights, as Mazar, a 50 year old man explains.

I think it is very fundamentalist and doesn't like to do pleasurable things, doesn't like art and doesn't like music, out to become some sort of fighter or some sort of suicide bomber, it's those kinds of negative Jihadist as they call it, and out to do damage to the mainstream society and this is the real distinction now and remember, this is very different from previous discrimination which was based on difference and fear of difference and here it's based on a belief that Muslims are out to destroy mainstream society and it's far more malicious and far more harmful because people can do things to Muslims and not worry about human rights and civil rights and all that. If you demonise them enough then it's acceptable to treat them differently and that's the real thing. You can justify the curtailment of human rights based on ones faith and the way they look and this has parallels with the way Nazi Germany treated the Jewish people, they demonised them enough and made them appear as a problem and then massive harm was done to them, and I see some parallels with that and the Muslim community.

Conclusion

Equality was found to be a dominant theme in the research. In the retrospective period, where negative perceptions of the state did exist, a great deal of inequality was not perceived because the state was not perceived to have failed British Muslims but all ethnic minorities. This suggests that where state inequality or racism is perceived for a shared minority identity, this decreases perceptions of inequality. The importance of diversity was also demonstrated because in the retrospective period, where rights existed for a variety of identities, British, ethnic and religious, this led to positive perceptions of the state.

Although the state adopted community cohesion, a policy which created a discourse incorporating British identity, the research demonstrates how participants' perceptions of being part of this identity were very complex. Community cohesion was found to be

an abstract policy which in fact, other than introducing concepts of shared citizenship and promoting these as the ideals which unite citizens, actually did very little to make participants feel British. Therefore, in terms of the future relationship between the state and British Muslims, it is important that the state recognises that policies which are based on minority identities, when perceived negatively can have an impact which transcends to such severe feelings of exclusion, that such marginalisation cannot be remedied through the introduction of other policies aimed at achieving unity, such as community cohesion.

When considering the more intricate ways in which the state has marginalised British Muslims, the introduction of counter terrorism legislation was instrumental in shaping such perceptions. Anger existed because the state failed to highlight the diversity of British Muslims and instead, homogenised the Islamic faith and associated British Muslims with terrorism. This suggests that although policies are important in terms of conveying citizens' identities, the words used by politicians and those that comprise the state are also important. Where politicians circulate discourses through the media, language should reflect commonality. There should be an acknowledgement that British Muslims are also victims in the 'war on terror' and the 'war on terror' is not merely a 'Muslim problem'. The state can only expect British Muslims to perceive commonality and therefore feel British, if it is willing to create the structural conditions and discourses within which British Muslims commonality is highlighted.

Perceptions by British Muslims that they represent and are a separate entity will increase the power and legitimacy of the narratives used by groups such as Al Qa'ida and ISIS. Generally, the term single narrative is 'used to refer to the particular interpretation of religion, history and politics that is associated with Al Qa'ida and like-minded groups. The narrative connects 'grievances' at a local and/or global level reinforces the portrayal of Muslims as victims of Western injustice and thereby purports to legitimise terrorism. It combines fact, fiction, emotion and religion and manipulates discontent about local and international issues' ([47], p. 108). Terrorism, radicalisation and community cohesion all involve the politicisation of identity, and although the global extremist narrative may involve the use of global grievances, it is important that perceptions of global grievance are not combined with perceptions of national grievances. The growing sense of marginalisation and isolation of British Muslims raises concerns for radicalisation. The research clearly demonstrates that if British Muslims are to be cohered into the British state, as the policy of community cohesion aims, then wider 'war on terror' policies need to stop marginalising British Muslims. The two discourses of community cohesion and the 'war on terror' have combined to create a discourse in which Islam and Muslim identity are constructed as a threat to British values. The 'war on terror' discourse is a very powerful divisive discourse. Given the findings of this research, it seems plausible to suggest that the state is in denial about the role of their own policies in isolating British Muslims to such an extent that they no longer feel British.

The value of this research is the fact that it covers over two decades, and from doing so, it is evident that British Muslims did feel an overwhelming sense of inclusion, and this was primarily because the state facilitated such inclusion through policies. It was the emphasis on British, in actual policies which impacted participants' lives and assisted in achieving perceived unity. When analysing the data, it is the shift from concrete policies, (such as those aimed at deprivation which made participants identify

with other British non-Muslims citizens) to a set of abstract policies around Britishness that have harmed social cohesion. According to the research, it is the Muslim in British Muslim which now shapes the concrete policies which govern British Muslims' lives. Therefore, if British Muslims are to have a stronger sense of identification which their British identity, it is essential that the state facilitates the conditions whereby they experience the same policies as British non-Muslims.

However, given the growth of exclusionary policies over the last decade, especially those pertaining to the Brexit 'Leave Campaign', it is hard to argue that divisive policies solely exist through counter terrorism policies. Xenophobia was inherent to the constructed cultural, social and economic threat of immigration pre and post Brexit [46].

Although ethnic racism was largely accepted as having been replaced with cultural racism by the 1990s, the increase of hate crimes and racial violence against ethnic minorities, media stigmatisation of minorities, and the dispersion of far-Right discourses of Britishness within mainstream society, have made post Brexit Britain a place of hostility [14, 55]. It could therefore be argued that given the post Brexit climate, there are far more policies which are acting to diminish perceived commonality between ethnic minorities and non-ethnic minority British citizens. This research has relevance to our understanding of the role of policies in shaping perceptions. Through providing empirical evidence to demonstrate the impact of divisive social policies on British Muslims and social cohesion, it is possible to grasp the destructive influence and impact of divisive policies such as the Brexit campaigns on ethnic minorities. And whereas this paper has focused on British Muslims, it could be argued that given the increase of divisive policies such as Brexit, a growing number of minority groups are experiencing exclusion on the basis of their religious identity and their ethnic identity.

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