Veiled Threats

Rashid, Naaz

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On one level, initiatives designed to ‘empower’ Muslim women are difficult to criticise. They are nonetheless also deeply problematic when framed in the context of the UK’s counterterrorism agenda. This is not because the presence of marginalised Muslim women in the UK who may be in need of empowerment is under question (although equally, that is not to suggest that all Muslim women are marginalised or in need of empowerment). Nor is there any doubt that the UK is subject to Islamist terrorist threats. The issue is, however, one of understanding the relationship between the two: how is the empowerment of Muslim women causally related, or even connected, to preventing violent extremism?

This book analyses the narratives around the relationship between ‘violent extremism’ and Muslim women’s empowerment. It is based on research which analysed relevant policy documents, including parliamentary debates and political speeches, exploring ‘a group of statements which provide a language for talking about a particular topic at a particular historical moment’ (Hall 1997: 44); in this case, ‘Muslim women’ in the UK in a post 7/7 context. Furthermore, ‘in consequence of being so classified, individual women and their experiences of themselves are changed by being so classified’ (Hacking 1999: 11). Consequently, the research also entailed interviews with policy actors, predominantly Muslim women, involved in these initiatives at a range of different levels of the policy chain. Documents analysed date from between 2005 and 2010; interviews were conducted between January 2009 and July 2010. The objectives of the research were twofold; to deconstruct the idea of the Muslim woman which emerges in the policy discourse through analysing the policy narratives and to explore the way Muslim women engaged with the narratives themselves. This deconstruction contributes to a process of ‘disalienation’, that is, ‘the unmaking of racialized bodies and their restoration to properly human modes of being in the world’ (Fanon cited in Gilroy 2004: 45). Further, as Errol Lawrence argues, the relationship between such ‘... common-sense notions, like common-sense ideologies generally, are
not just carried round in people’s heads. They are embedded within actual material practices’ (Lawrence 1982: 76). One of the themes that this book looks at therefore is the impact that Prevent funding has had on Muslim women’s organisations and their relationship with other black and minority ethnic (BME) women’s groups.

The following section sets out the key themes that foreground the discursive production of ‘the Muslim woman’ in relation to the policy landscape of the War on Terror, both globally and nationally, including debates on the relationship between multiculturalism and multi-faithism and feminism; as well as historical and parallel global perspectives on Muslim women.

Prevent

The 2005 London bombings prompted a broad range of policy responses from the New Labour government. One of these was the Preventing Violent Extremism agenda (or ‘Prevent’). Prevent itself was part of the Home Office’s counter-terrorism strategy which consisted of the ‘Four Ps’: Pursue (to stop terrorist attacks), Prevent (to stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism), Protect (to strengthen our protection against terror attack) and Prepare (where an attack cannot be stopped, to mitigate its impact).

The Prevent Strategy itself consisted of five key strands which were as follows: Challenging the violent extremist ideology and supporting mainstream voices; Disrupting those who promote violent extremism and supporting the institutions where they are active; Supporting individuals who are being targeted and recruited to the cause of violent extremism; Increasing the resilience of communities to violent extremism; and Addressing the grievances that ideologues are exploiting. By the time the Empowering Muslim Women (EMW) initiatives were launched, the Prevent agenda was already being criticised on a variety of levels: for demonising the Muslim population as a whole, in particular through creating and perpetuating anti-Muslim racist stereotypes; for securitising the race equality agenda and for inadvertently supporting extremist groups.

Local Authorities and the police were granted funding to work with local communities in order ‘to build resilience’ against extremism (HM Government 2008: 13); one of the things they were encouraged to do was to give ‘the silent majority a stronger voice in their communities’. Both women and young people were seen as part of the ‘silent majority’ and two working groups were set up focused on them. There was, however, a clear overlap since a key initiative directed at ‘Muslim
women’ was in fact directed at Muslim girls, highlighting the fact that often when we refer to ‘youth’ it is a gender neutral way of referring to boys and young men rather than young people of both sexes. The Prevent agenda (and the counterterrorism agenda more generally) is undoubtedly gendered in that it was, albeit implicitly, predominantly focused on young men, yet there was very little explicit discussion in the policy arena regarding this.

The Prevent agenda, as part of a wider counter terrorism strategy, forms part of the UK’s ‘War on Terror’. It emphasised the battle for ‘hearts and minds’ and addressed (non-violent) extremism in individuals before they could become radicalised and drawn into committing acts of terrorism. As Kundnani (2014) argues, however, the relationship between extremism, radicalisation and the propensity to commit acts of terrorism is by no means clear (see Chapter 2). Khan describes how ‘the transnationalised governmentality of the “war on terror” has become inflected within the discursive vocabulary of racism’ (2006: 184). This racism is both gendered and sexualised (Bhattacharyya 2008; Razack 2008). In consequence, mainstream liberal feminism has found a strange bedfellow in neoliberal imperialist projects throughout the Muslim world.1 Feminism has been instrumentalised such that ‘Western sexual freedoms are strategically deployed in order to support notions of civilisation and superiority’ (McRobbie 2009: 1). In this book I am specifically interested in how feminism, or at least a particular variety of feminism, may be implicated in the process of racialising Muslims in the UK. More importantly, this faux feminism ‘displaces possible solidarities, with a reinstated hierarchy of civilisation and modernity’ (McRobbie 2009: 27).

Community cohesion

Prior to Prevent, the UK’s race equality agenda was dominated by the community cohesion policy paradigm. Multiculturalism had been strongly critiqued for allegedly leading to communities living ‘parallel lives’ (Cantle 2001) and a society ‘sleep–walking into segregation’ (Trevor Phillips, Chair of CRE 2005). Even the ‘progressive’ left had pronounced the death of multiculturalism in its infamous edition of Prospect magazine (2009). As a result, since the urban disturbances in the north of England in 2001, policies focused on ‘community cohesion’ emerged as the dominant paradigm of ‘race relations’ governmental policy and practice (Solomos 2003; Kundnani 2002a). Although on one level talking about ‘communities’ enables language to be deracialised (Worley 2005), in practice, however, it often refers
Veiled threats

to talking exclusively about Muslim communities and, particularly following the 7/7 bombings in 2005, is imbricated with the desire to manage the risk of terrorism rather than any explicit desire to address racial inequality (McGhee 2005). More generally, as Fortier has argued, the cohesion agenda ‘fails to recognise any claims to difference…as political…in terms of the relational, material, symbolic and cultural variations and power relations that position people and groups differentially in terms of access to, and uses of, resources’ (Fortier 2010: 27). As discussed in this book this is a fundamental omission, further exacerbated since 2008 by the politics of austerity which foreground the more specific community or counterterrorist focused policy initiatives.

As Jones argues, analysing the community cohesion agenda highlights ‘the importance of shifting and unstable meanings in policy,’ and the complicated nuanced meanings that circulate at different areas of putting policy into practice in different places (2013: 1). This is equally relevant in the case of Prevent. Embedded within it are various underlying suppositions which may or may not be true. Nonetheless, despite this slipperiness and the possibilities of more nuanced negotiation in terms of practice, at the level of top down policy discourses, the Prevent agenda and community cohesion policy are inherently contradictory (Husband and Alam 2011). On the one hand, community cohesion is a policy imperative whose raison d’être is to overcome the alleged boundaries purported to exist between different ‘communities’, that is, to make sure everyone gets along. On the other hand, the Prevent strategy is ostensibly focused on communities deemed to be at risk of extremism, that is, an imagined Muslim community. Both agendas are, however, framed by broader questions about multiculturalism. As a concept or policy ideal ‘multiculturalism’, despite the fluidity in its definition, has been called into question at a variety of levels. First it has been accused of undermining national unity; second it has been suggested that it has been superseded by ‘multifaithism’; and thirdly multiculturalism has been deemed to be incompatible with feminism.

The death of multiculturalism...

...and Britishness

The 7/7 London bombings and concerns about ‘home-grown’ terrorism were widely framed in terms of the presence of ethnic and religious diversity. As a result, they stimulated debates about Britishness and in the immediate aftermath in particular there were (and continue to be) increasing government appeals to foster ‘Britishness’ to counter
future terrorist acts and there was a resurgence in the idea of nationalism as a cohesive force (Brown 2006). Within this new nationalism different ‘others’ are constructed thus allowing Britishness to be negatively defined by focusing on what (or who) needs to be integrated or assimilated. This imagining of a national community (Anderson 2006) or nation building project is gendered (Anthias and Davis 1992). Scharff (2011) for example shows how gender constructions of white British (and German) women are formed in opposition to ‘disempowered’ Muslim women. (Chapter 2 explores this in more detail through documentary analysis).

EMW policy initiatives therefore form part of a broader imperative to define national (and European) borders against a background of racism and post-colonial guilt, rather than ‘women’s liberation’ per se. In addition, given that culture is perceived to be located within the private and domestic arenas of home and family (Worley 2005), women are perceived as being primarily responsible for cultural reproduction. The book seeks to analyse how, in the contemporary geopolitical climate, the idea of ‘the Muslim woman’ is used as a marker of difference between ‘the West and the rest’, signifying the inherent incompatibility of Muslim ‘culture’ with Britishness.

…and the rise of multifaithism

The demise of multiculturalism is also viewed in terms of a process of ‘de-secularisation’; it has been suggested that we are moving from multiculturalism to multifaithism and that civil society is becoming increasingly de-secularised (Patel 2008; Yuval-Davis 2009; Dhaliwal and Yuval-Davis 2014). Patel (2008) has argued that the entrenchment of faith communities represents a particular threat for women and I discuss this in more depth below. These issues are also examined in more depth in Chapter 6. Such developments, frequently associated with the Rushdie affair, have often been characterised as a ‘shift away from demands for equality on the basis of race/ethnicity to demands for special treatment on the basis of religion’ (Macey 2010: 39) (author’s emphasis). This was specifically with reference to demands about extending blasphemy laws to accommodate non Church of England religions.

This move towards de-secularisation is frequently presented as relatively recent. Furbey et al (2006), for example, suggest that formal recognition of faith communities and their organisations in public policy was first reflected in the Inner Cities Religious Council (ICRC), established in 1992. This, however, ignores the long history of links
between the state and church in the UK and the normative position of the Church of England. The presumption that Britain is ‘secular’ is brought into question by the fact that religion has an ‘established’ position in the structure of the state (Modood 1997); many of the normative ideas about the British nation have religious underpinnings for example, the fact that the monarch is both the head of state and the head of the Church of England, the existence of voluntary aided (Church funded) schools, and Christian acts of worship in schools. One consequence of this ‘Anglican privilege’ may be that there is no system of formally recognising that ‘other faiths’ exist (McLoughlin and Cesari 2005). Requests for accommodation by members of minority religions might therefore represent a desire for ‘equality’ rather than ‘special privileges’. Furthermore there are a variety of interpretations of what constitutes ‘secularism’; the alternative to religious fundamentalism is not necessarily fundamentalism of the secular sort (Al-Ali 2014).

Despite this suggestion that religion is superseding (ethnic) ‘culture’, it is worth noting that many Muslim (and other religious) ‘communities’ continue to be organised around ethnicity. There are of course sectarian divergences within the Muslim population, between Sunnis, Shias, Ismailis and Sufis, for example, and mosques follow these distinctions. In addition, although there are mosques which serve very diverse ethnic minority communities, historically in the UK they have largely been established by particular ethnicities in specific geographic locations. For example, there are 10 or more different mosques in Southwark alone organised by ethnicity – Somali, Nigerian and Ivorian, as well as the longer established Turkish, Pakistani and Bangladeshi mosques. This suggests that the separation between ‘faith’ and ‘culture’ (based on common sense understandings of these terms) is rather more complex. If religion has supplanted ‘culture’ then why are mosques organised like this? Arguably, language, the geographical concentration of those with a shared ethnic heritage often as a result of particular migratory trajectories, and access to resources, seem equally, if not more, influential. The increasingly diversified composition of the UK’s ‘Muslim community’ and how this needs to be taken into account is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

The problem with multiculturalism...and feminism

Within feminist political theory there has been much theoretical debate about the compatibility or otherwise of multiculturalism and feminism. In her polemic article *Is Multiculturalism bad for Women?* Okin (1999) argues that the two are fundamentally opposed and that
granting ‘group rights’ fosters cultural relativism. Okin’s work uses a range of examples predominantly from France, yet the rationale for her position applies in the UK and is best exemplified by the work of Beckett and Macey (2001) and Macey (2009) who argue that some cultural and religious ‘traditions’ are in direct conflict with the struggle for justice and equality. Their presentation of domestic and homophobic violence as a ‘cultural practice’ which is particular to Muslims is problematic since describing them as such implies that they ‘are normal and widely endorsed behaviours in minority communities’ (Dustin and Phillips 2008: 419). Quite clearly, however, occurrence does not mean endorsement.

Both Okin (1999) and Macey (2010) can be criticised for the problematic way in which they characterise multiculturalism and the way in which minority women might suffer in that context. The emphasis on inter group differences at the expense of intra group differences is problematic (Sassen 1999). Other women’s lives are seen primarily in relation to their belonging to minority communities and ‘culture’ is invoked for anything that happens to Third world or immigrant women (Mohanty 2003). The asymmetrical ascription of culture assumes that ‘other’ cultures are regarded as frozen static entities (Narayan 1997 cited in Volpp 2001: 1190). In this sense women are only seen as subject to patriarchy from within their communities rather than subject to gender discrimination more widely and racism, anti-Muslim or otherwise.

As Meetoo and Mirza have suggested, however, ‘within the discourse of multiculturalism, women “fall between the cracks”’, arguing that ‘race’ and ethnicity are prioritised as gender differences and inequalities are rendered invisible (2007: 197). The debate about ‘multiculturalism vs feminism’ creates a false dichotomy in which we are asked to choose between prioritising either gender or ‘race’ equality. This is not in fact a choice at all since it presupposes that all black people are men and that all women are white, that is, that neither racism nor patriarchy are issues which affect black women. In spite of the extensive work that has been done by black and postcolonial feminists to highlight this thorny issue (both in terms of the academy and activism), mainstream understandings continue to position the two separately. As Anne Phillips has argued, ‘multiculturalism can be made compatible with the pursuit of gender equality and women’s rights so long as it dispenses with an essentialist understanding of culture’ (2007: 9). One way to dispense with such essentialism is to write against culture (Abu-Lughod 2013), that is to emphasise the wider geopolitical and socio historical contexts within which such phenomena occur.
Veiled threats

Something old, something new: colonial antecedents

In talking about how ‘the Muslim woman’ is discursively produced at a particular historical moment, it is important to attend to the continuities and discontinuities with both earlier and concurrent gendered racisms. It ‘is necessary to analyse the social processes through which gender differences have been constructed and reproduced against the background of colonialism and imperialism’ (Brah 1992: 68). The way in which the Muslim community is constructed in policy narratives draws on Orientalist ideas, in which communities are fixed in a timeless present (Childs and Williams 1997) and where members are constructed as childlike, requiring guidance from their Western superiors (Fanon 1968; Nandy 1988). In the context of the Prevent agenda, the ‘Muslim community’ as a whole is infantilised and Muslim women are infantilised even further (Brown 2011).

Historically (and specifically in the British context), South Asian women have played a key role in the production of difference between the West and the Rest (Hall 1992; Puwar and Raghuram 2003; McLintock 1995). Furthermore, the language of feminism and the ‘liberation of women’ has been used by colonialists to define a boundary between the liberated West and the barbaric East and it can be argued that melodrama marks the place of South Asian women in popular, official and academic discourses (Puwar 2003). Colonial justifications for social policy interventions included bringing universalist Enlightenment values to the ‘dark continents’, and there are clear parallels with contemporary humanitarian interventions (Chandler 2002), as well as in domestic policy discourses. As Spivak (1988: 297) has articulated, there is a long tradition of ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’ and comparisons can be drawn with social interventions in relation to South Asian women. Spivak’s oft-quoted phrase could be extended to include ‘white women’ alongside white men; there is a growing body of literature on the role of discourse and gender in the colonial era and the impact of colonialism on the development of first wave feminism (Sangari and Vaid 1989; Jayawardena 1995; Levine 2004; Powell and Lambert-Hurley 2005; Midgley 2007).

In more recent history, the theme of the Asian woman disadvantaging her children has characterised how Asian women in post-war Britain have been perceived. Pratibha Parmar writes, for example, how Asian women are problematically conceptualised as:
...non-working wives and mothers, whose problems are that they do not speak English, hardly ever leave the house, and find British norms and values ever more threatening as their children become more ‘integrated’ into the new surroundings. Their lives are limited to the kitchen, the children and the religious rituals, and they are both emotionally and economically dependent upon their husbands. (1982: 250)

This passage remains salient, over thirty years on, particularly if the term ‘Asian’ is replaced with ‘Muslim’.  

**Islam and Feminism**

Even within the category South Asian, Muslim women are positioned as being in particular need of empowerment. The role of religious fundamentalism in supporting patriarchy in a number of religious communities has been documented (Sahgal and Yuval-Davis 1992; WLUM 2001; Dhalliwal & Yuval-Davis 2014). There is, however, a particularly prevalent discourse about Islam and gender equality more generally (Razak 2007; Fernandez 2009; Kumar 2012). As Abu-Lugod argues, ‘gendered orientalism has taken on a new life and new forms in our feminist twenty-first century’ (2013: 202). This discourse is widely established in the broadsheet liberal media (Toynbee 2001; Hari 2008; Burchill 2010). As Afshar writes, ‘feminism...is hailed as the ultimate weapon of the British middle class hegemony and is at its most pernicious where Muslim women are concerned’ (1994: 145). There is also a large body of popular literature, which Donohoue Clyne (2002) calls ‘airport fiction’, on the themes of oppressed Muslim women and generalised Muslim misogyny (in Muslim countries) that has allowed much vitriol to be cast on Islam from ‘within’ (Darwish 2006; Hirsi Ali 2006; 2007; 2010) and ‘without’ (Fallaci 2002).

The theme of empowering Muslim women to combat terrorism therefore resonates because of prevalent discourses around the insurmountable incompatibility of Islam and feminism and the incompatibility of feminism and multiculturalism. This idea of empowerment is seductive, feeding into common-sense understandings since it additionally builds on the racist stereotypes of South Asian women in the British postcolonial context. As such, the EMW initiatives and wider initiatives are conducted in a fairly narrow framework of empowerment ‘within the community’ rather than in the context of society at large.
Empowerment

Despite being a ‘buzzword’, the term ‘empowerment’ lacks explicit and conclusive definitions (Ette 2007). Feminist perspectives on empowerment, while not homogeneous, include more layered and multi-dimensional approaches that depart from perceiving empowerment as part of a liberal atomistic privatized form of citizenship (Honig 1999) which is inseparable from individualism and consumerism (Rowlands 1997). Instead, feminist interpretations emphasise collective empowerment, or ‘power-with’ (Rowlands 1995) and psychological forms of empowerment, or ‘power-from-within’ (Stacki and Monkman 2003), and are more concerned with the social context of power. Empowerment requires the challenging of patriarchal power relations that result in women having less control over material assets and intellectual resources (Batliwala 1994).

Empowerment is not therefore a process that can be ‘done to or for women’ (Afshar 1997: 4); it must emerge from women themselves. Although ostensibly the EMW initiatives were overseen by Muslim women, ‘empowerment’ is only sought in so far as it relates to the Prevent agenda. There were parallel initiatives about increasing the number of Muslim (and other BME) women councillors. Even these approaches, though, continue to position ‘Other’ women almost exclusively within the framework of ‘community’ politics; they appear to be motivated more by a desire to change who is seen to represent ‘the Muslim community’ rather than Muslim women being seen as credible representatives of wider non-Muslim political constituencies. In this sense, these initiatives conform to the very multicultural policy paradigm New Labour purported to want to move away from. Muslim women are engaged with as women in Muslim communities rather than as Muslims living in a particular borough, city, the UK, or as women in a patriarchal society (not just community) or as insecure citizens in a world with ever increasingly policed borders.

Feminism in the context of the EMW initiatives therefore emerges as part of a civilisationist discourse in which it is positioned as part of a modernising mission. This perspective claims ownership of and responsibility for feminism as a Western value, thus ignoring a whole history of black feminist critiques of white Western feminism and also the existence of ‘native feminisms’. As a feminist I am concerned at the way in which feminism, albeit a liberal individualistic variant of it, has been appropriated to this end.
(Mis)representing Muslim Women

Reflection on how social phenomena get defined as problems in need of explanation in the first place quickly reveals that there is no such thing as a problem without a person (or groups of them) who have this problem: a problem is always a problem for someone or other (Harding 1987: 6).

The visibility of Muslims in both academia and the policy arena is unequivocal if highly problematic. The relatively recent focus on ‘Muslims’ as a category in sociological research reflects political developments both nationally and globally. As Alexander has argued, ‘[t]he conceptual mapping of “the Muslim menace” which links suicide bombers with extremist Muslim clerics and recent “riots”, articulates a very specific imagination of “the Muslim community” in Britain – one which is marked by both gendered and generational difference’ (2003: 3, cited in McGhee 2005).

Back et al refer to the ‘penumbral regions that link mainstream social science to social policy design, think tanks and journalism’ (2009: 2) and there is unquestionably an iterative relationship between policy and research. Research informs policy but equally, policy steers research, particularly since it is often accompanied by funding. In the case of research on Muslims, the current political climate, both nationally and globally, means that there is much governmental interest in funding research around radicalisation and counter terrorism. To give a sense of the volume of literature dedicated to the radicalisation thesis, according to Kundnani, by 2010 one hundred articles per year were being published in peer reviewed journals (2014: 119). Unsurprisingly therefore there remains ‘widespread popular fascination with Muslim masculinity’ (Archer 2003: 1) in academia since it is men who are considered to be most susceptible to radicalisation, although this too is changing as I will discuss in the epilogue. This mirrors broader policy concerns about Muslim masculinity specifically (as opposed to masculinity more generally) following the 2001 urban disturbances and 7/7 bombings (Lewis 2007; Choudhury 2007). Muslim male youth emerge as contemporary folk devils (Salgado-Pottier 2008). By contrast Muslim women are presented rather differently. There is a greater focus on education and employment (as though Muslim boys do not experience any ethnic penalty in education or more importantly at the point of entry into the labour market). Women’s relationship to religion also features prominently and religion is dichotomously, or
even simultaneously imagined as either empowerment or oppression (Afshar et al 2005; Ameli and Merali 2006; Werbner 2007). Religion as a form of social capital can be used differently by young British Muslim men and women (Ramji 2007) and for some Muslim women the formation of an articulated ‘Islamic’ identity in the public and private spheres enables them to negotiate and acquire rights in new and transformative ways (Dwyer 1999a; Brown 2006b).

Against this background in both academic and policy domains I experienced ethical concerns regarding undertaking research in this field and personally contributing to reinscribing ‘new racist ideologies of essential cultural difference’ (Alexander 1996: 13–14) in the production of anti-Muslim rhetoric. Undertaking this research, both in terms of the topic itself and the manner in which it was conducted, was therefore ‘an expressly political project aimed at creating knowledge about the social relations and practices of domination, white supremacy, and exploitation for the purposes of challenging and changing these systems’ (Hughes 2005: 205). The book scrutinises these social relations empirically and in so doing constitutes feminist research since it offers ‘…alternative origins of problematics, explanatory hypotheses and evidence, alternative purposes of enquiry, and a new prescription for the appropriate relationship between the inquirer and his/her subject of inquiry’ (Harding 1987: vii).

As Jones argues, the unstable meanings within policy ‘[create] space to engage with larger themes including the nature of society, identity, equality, migration and belonging’ (2013: 1). This is why the study looks both at documentary and interview material as a way of understanding the dynamics of discursive racial formations of ‘the Muslim woman’ in the narratives and practice of policy. As Deborah Cameron argues, ‘…names are a culture’s way of fixing what will actually count as reality in a universe of overwhelming, chaotic sensations, all pregnant with a multitude of possible meanings’ (2001: 12). Discourse therefore represents a site of struggle where forces of social (re)production and contestation are played out (Lazar 2005). Otherwise ‘…to detach language from its historical, cultural, and social roots, to think of it as outside individual and societal control, is a certain route to political quietism – a sense that nothing can really be changed’ (Cameron 2001: 19). To demonstrate how women are represented and constructed in and by language is therefore a political act (Zalewski 2000).

It would be difficult to deny the systematic (mis)representation of Muslims and Islam in the press (Said 1997; Richardson 2004; Poole and Richardson 2006). I chose, however, to focus attention on discourse in
the political arena because of the ways in which political or elite racism validates or legitimates ‘popular’ racism. While arguably the media is more pervasive, it is not, however, necessarily the more influential of the two; political discourse derives considerable power from both its scope and legitimacy and is a key constituent of elite racism (van Tijk 2008). Moreover, there is clearly a relationship between the state and the media and the two doubtlessly interact; it is certainly true that many people’s understanding of political discourse is negotiated via the media. Within the media, however, politicians have preferential access relative to the public more widely. Not only is what politicians say widely reported on, politicians themselves occasionally take on the role of columnists, both in the broadsheets and the tabloids (Brown 2004; 2009; Blair 2007; Blunkett 2009; Cable 2010). In addition, as the Leveson enquiry illustrated, the relationship between politicians and the media is far from innocent, and as Butler argues, in the post 9/11 climate there has been a growing acceptance of censorship in the press: while the media ‘report the “voice” of the government for us… [their]…proximity to that voice rests on an alliance or identification with that voice’ (2004: 1).

More fundamentally, government policy establishes a framework within which individuals and ‘communities’ operate in terms of political engagement; it therefore produces them as subjects of social policy. Rather than simplistically compare the language of political discourse with that used in ‘everyday life’, this book looks at how discourse constitutes everyday practice. It builds on the idea that ‘the relationship between discourse and the social is a dialectical one, in which discourse constitutes, and is constituted by, social situations, institutions and structures’ (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 11). ‘It is not simply the documents and official definitions of community cohesion that are important in understanding how community cohesion works; it is also the way these documents are understood, interpreted and reacted against’ (Jones 2013: 5).

This project is therefore not about language alone. It is about the way that policy operates and is practiced and has real effects and consequences. As demonstrated in the following chapters, changes in policy language are not a question of mere semantics; such changes influence and affect how people can access resources. This analysis draws attention to the role of government in creating, perpetuating and reifying particular racial categorisations. It is not a policy evaluation in the sense of measuring outcomes, principally because there are no ‘outcomes’, at least none that are easily quantifiable. Instead, I analyse how the policy works at a symbolic level.
My intervention into this arena was an effort to analyse how this ‘Muslim menace’ has been constructed at the level of policy discourse and specifically how it is gendered. I also wanted to look at the experiences of Muslim women involved in this policy area and explore the problems associated with the privileging of religious affiliation particularly for those defined within the ‘Muslim as problem’ paradigm.

**Being Muslim**

Knowing is not so much about the assemblage of existing knowledge as it is about recognizing our constitution as ‘ourselves’ within the fragments that we process as knowledge; ‘hailing’ and being ‘hailed’ within the discourses that produce us and the narratives we spin. (Brah 1999)

While wary of overanalysing the importance of positionality, as Harding notes, ‘introducing this ‘subjective’ element into the analysis in fact increases the objectivity of the research and decreases the “objectivism” which hides this kind of evidence from the public’ (1987: 9). As an ‘ethnicised’ woman who has gone from being hailed as merely ‘(South) Asian’ to ‘Bangladeshi’ to appearing as ‘Muslim’ in policy discourses, these taxonomical changes are imbued with personal relevance. The very fact that these categorisations vary illustrates the historical and political specificity of particular racial categories; it is not the case that ‘racial divisions… [are] anterior to politics’ (Gilroy 2004: 35). Furthermore, this curiosity is not merely a simple case of narcissism; the reality is that such representations inspired unsettling feelings of dissonance. Despite the pervasive power of images of ‘the Muslim woman’ and the virulence with which such caricatures have proliferated, I have been unable to recognise either myself or anyone else of my acquaintance in these depictions. In saying this, however, I am certainly not claiming that I have any more authority or authenticity as a result of my Muslimness, only that my research questions, findings and analysis are produced through this lens.

This book does not claim to be an evaluation of the policy. Nor is it an intervention into the debate about the empowering effects of religion; nor a commentary on whether Muslim women need empowering. It is based on a small scale study analysing pertinent texts and using in-depth interviews with different people at various levels of the policy chain. Not only were the initiatives on a small scale, I interviewed a wide range of disparate people. As such the book provides a detailed snap shot of a policy in action; it situates it in a wider policy landscape.
and examines the relationship between policy discourse and policy practitioners.

The key document was a Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) publication called *Empowering Muslim Women: Case Studies* (DCLG 2008). This was the outcome from the Preventing Violent Extremism Action Plan (DCLG 2007) in which the Government committed itself to the publication of a document on effective initiatives to strengthen the role that Muslim women play in their communities. The booklet provided a snapshot of projects involving initiatives to empower Muslim women to play a role in their communities and society more widely. The projects fall into a number of categories, reflecting the routes through which it is imagined that Muslim women may be empowered: economic participation, education, civic participation and arts, culture and sports. In addition, it includes a number of projects that are underway which allegedly directly support women in playing a pro-active role in preventing violent extremism. I analysed this in the context of other documents where women were referred to. These included press releases, articles by politicians, as well as related policy documents. I also looked at transcripts of speeches given by politicians.

EMW is positioned within a broader social policy framework. Policies targeted at Muslim women are situated within wider debates on immigration, community cohesion, integration and nationalism. This demanded consideration of a broader range of texts, highlighting the importance of ‘intertextuality’ in analysing discourse; that is, recognition that all text and talk is situated within a complex of other texts. Talbot defines intertextuality as that which ’expresses a sense of blurred boundaries, a sense of a text as a bundle of points of intersection with other texts’ (2005: 168). Such an analysis is clearly important if one accepts that ‘a political project will attempt to weave together different strands of discourse…to…organise a field of meaning so as to fix the identities of objects and practices in a particular way’ (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 3).

In total, I undertook 25 interviews between 2009 and 2010. I was able to interview five members of the National Muslim Women’s Advisory Group (NMWAG), two anonymously. In addition, I interviewed a range of people indirectly or directly involved in the policy initiatives: local authority Community Cohesion Officers, Community Police Officers, civil servants and journalists as well as activists and third sector workers from BME women’s groups (secular and Muslim). In March 2009 I also attended an Equalities and Human Rights Commission conference (in Birmingham as it was organised by the West Midlands
Veiled threats

Regional Office). Its objective was to recognise Muslim women’s roles and contributions to society to mark International Women’s Day. The conference was part of a programme to promote ‘new voices’ and the Commission’s work to empower the unheard or marginalised. I attended the quarterly NMWAG meeting on 22 February 2010 which was followed by a networking lunch for the members of both NMWAG and YMAG. Between January and March 2009 I attended three of the six road shows set up ‘to empower Muslim girls’. This allowed me to meet a number of role models and members of the partner organisations delivering the road show in different places. I attended a Prevent conference in December 2009 in Birmingham at which John Denham MP spoke and which included workshops focused on good practice. Gaining access to some of the other work streams was harder (and not only for me; one of my interviewees complained about not being able to get access to what she described as the ‘sexier’ topics such as theological interpretation). I also attended one of the workshops and school trips funded by Prevent that had been organised by the Three Faiths Forum. The project was called Faith and Fashion; I attended the workshop at the school and the school trip to the Victoria and Albert Museum exploring ideas about modesty in a historical context. My interviews and observation took place in London (Newham, Brent, Ealing and Westminster), Bristol, Cardiff, Birmingham, Bradford and Manchester.

Letherby (2003) highlights the importance of reflexivity and emotion as sources of insight. The research, involving in-depth semi structured qualitative interviews with a range of people across the policy trajectory, meant that the relationship between me as the researcher and the researched varied. Such variations were an integral part of the research process and highlight how knowledge was constructed in this particular research project. As Ali has argued “criticisms of ”subjectivity” obscure the complex relationship between subjects, epistemology, politics and research” whereas “”being reflexive” means not only reflecting on one’s own identity, but reflecting on how one’s identity relates to issues of power, and impacts on research and respondents’ (2006: 476).

Despite not wanting to perpetuate the obsession with what Muslim women wear, it was difficult to escape the fact that the veil has become an ‘over determined marker of difference’ for the identity of young British Muslim women (Dwyer 1999a: 5). As well as being a dominant theme that came up in policy, in interviews and in the media during the research period, the issue of how I presented myself to others, in terms of what I wore, was also a theme in the research process. Given the ‘whole constellation of meanings’ attached to wearing ‘Asian’ clothes...
or English clothes (Dwyer 2000: 478) I chose to dress differently with different interviewees. Although initially concerned at my contrivance, I eventually concluded that it was no different to what I and most people do every day. I cannot know whether any of my interviewees even noticed or were remotely bothered by how I was dressed.

Given my own preoccupation with the way the Muslim women are represented, there are ethical concerns for me in how I represent research participants’ voices. Letherby (2003) emphasises the authority of the researcher in selecting and rejecting data at the different stages of the research. Obviously, I have respected requests for anonymity but I have been concerned about including particular comments and statements which I have found uncomfortable. Are the representations of Muslim women which others will see in my book any more valid than the representations I am purporting to critique?

Within this policy arena there are strong opinions, informed by experience and emotion and some of this felt difficult. Many of my interviewees were quite keen to seek my opinion. Given the political nature of the topic and the controversy that had surrounded it, I found it difficult to answer questions relating to my opinion of the work they were involved in. Some were keen to find out my opinion on the work of NMWAG. I was also aware that my own particular view of anti-Muslim racism and the imperative to decode and deconstruct was not shared by many of my respondents for various reasons. Some, for example, felt that anti-Muslim racism was ‘just like any other racism’ and should not be identified separately as it detracted from other racisms. Also many respondents were very passionate about what they did and did not necessarily see or were not interested in the bigger picture that I was trying to assess, that is, the unintended consequences of Prevent. There were people who shared my discomfort with the Prevent agenda, but for different reasons, and had no qualms about reifying or in fact genuinely believing in the idea of a universally oppressed Muslim community.

Notes
1 See Abu-Lughod (2002) for a critique of the role of anthropology in this.
2 The urban disturbances in the northern cities of Oldham, Blackburn and Bradford involved clashes between predominantly Muslim male youth against the police and white male youth.
3 Interestingly I have also seen the term ‘community cohesion’ invoked to refer to something very different, in fact, the opposite of the way it is used in policy language. In a souvenir brochure marking the granting by OFCOM of the first 24 hour licence for a Bengali language radio station in Europe, Betar Bangla, the term was used to suggest that ‘community cohesion’ was about cohesion within
Veiled threats

the Bengali language community, demonstrating the ambiguity in the term (Jones 2013)

4 See Joan Scott (2007) in relation to the veil debate in France, for example.

5 Omoniyi & Fishman (2010) define multifaithism as the ‘institutional recognition of multiple faiths by the state and the granting of equal rights and protection to devotees by law.’

6 Moreover, the history of the Muslim presence in the UK is much longer than is often recognised. The first Muslims date from early as the 12th century with the first English convert in the 16th century and the first purpose built mosque (in Woking) established in 1889 (Ansari 2004).

7 See Bawer (2006) who uses the issue of gay rights in an Islamophobic invective (while at the same time acting as an apologist for US Christian fundamentalist homophobia).

8 Volpp also highlights that African-American ‘communities’ are seen to be dominated by women and are pathologised for not being patriarchal enough.

9 It is also perhaps disingenuous to cite cultural sensitivity when, as Razack (2008) argues, the invisibility of violence against minority women is in fact an illustration of racism in service provision and authorities’ racist tendency to naturalise violence against South Asian women.

10 Notwithstanding the considerable variations within the potentially totalising discourse of the West and the rest.

11 Mani (1998) has, for example, considered the way in which women were in fact marginal to the debate on sati and that the British imperative to abolish it stemmed more from the moral civilising claims of a colonial power and a negotiation with patriarchal Brahmin Hindu elites.

12 Ahmed (1992) and Lazreg (1994) explore these themes in colonial feminisms in the Egyptian and Algerian contexts respectively. Given the increasingly diverse composition of Britain’s Muslim population, which now includes non-South Asian migrant heritage Muslims, these other histories of feminism and colonialism have resonance.

13 See also ‘The common sense image of the Asian mother is similar. She is isolated from the beneficial effects of English culture because her movements are circumscribed by custom, and she therefore invariably fails to learn English. She is viewed as particularly prone to superstitious beliefs and, being more traditional than the other members of her family, is also more ‘neurotic’ in her new urban setting…it is worth noting here how the Asian mother is presented…as the main barrier to the integration of her children into the ‘wider British society’’ (Lawrence 1982: 78).

14 I am using this term as defined by Meetoo and Mirza (2007) to emphasise the process of racial objectification. ‘Thus being or becoming ‘ethnicised’ brings into play the power relations that inform and structure the gaze of the ‘other’ which, we suggest frames the women’s experience’ (2007: 2)

15 For example, there were various discussions in relation to legislating against the niqab and burka in Belgium, Italy and France during this period as well as parallel discussions here (BBC 2010a; BBC 2010b; Ruggeri 2011).