Discrimination against Muslims in Scotland

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Introduction

The Scottish context has been characterised as an easier environment for Muslims to integrate in comparison to England, due to lower fear of terrorism, lower settlement numbers and the perceived positive attitudes of Scottish people, for example friendliness, sociability and a welcoming disposition (Homes et al. 2010). Furthermore, the relationship between the Muslim and non-Muslim populations in Scotland have benefited from the specific socio-historical settlement of South Asian communities in the country, who did not compete for jobs with the majority Scottish people when working as pedlars in the mid-1920s and later when entering education and moving into self-employment, who privileged house ownership and private renting and, therefore, avoided competition for public services in the 1950s and 1960s, who have so far not created major troubles and whose involvement in business has helped promote a positive public image (Maan 1992).

Moreover, in Scotland Anglophobia may displace Islamophobia (Hussain and Miller 2006), in a context in which English people encounter barriers to belonging due to their national identities (McIntosh et al. 2008), and feed anxieties and insecurities among Scottish people (Bond et al. 2010). At the same time, the Scottish media tend to be less belligerent than the Daily Mail, the Daily Express and The Sun, which, among them, seem to either reflect or form English attitudes. Furthermore, the national flag and expressions of allegiance to it have not become associated with a code for racial exclusiveness. Lastly, the policy messages emerging from Holyrood, and particularly from the governing Scottish National Party (SNP), in support of immigration as a way to address demographic challenges and achieve sustainable economic growth in Scotland resonate in stark opposition to Westminster’s measures to restrict immigration (McCollum et al. 2014).

Nevertheless, the daily realities in which Scottish Muslims live are diverse, fluid and complex. In fact, such realities also include prejudice and are coloured by the insecurities that sustain the cultural barriers between Muslims and non-Muslims in a context in which the former might perceive the latter to hold more negative views of them than they do (Homes et al. 2010). The differences between the two constituencies that host the two largest Muslim communities, Glasgow and Edinburgh, are a reminder of the rather inhomogeneous and patchy experiences...
of being a Muslim in Scotland. On the one hand, Glasgow hosts the most ethnically segregated area in Scotland – namely, Pollokshields. On the other hand, Edinburgh presents itself as a socio-economically and culturally distinctive town. Unlike Glasgow, Edinburgh’s smaller, ethnically diverse – albeit of majority Pakistani origin or heritage – Muslim population is scattered throughout the town, a socio-spatial factor which might favour integration, if contact theory (Allport 1954) – ‘the greater the familiarity, the lower the level of prejudice’ (Field 2007, p. 465) – holds true. The community gathers around ten official mosques, which tend to serve different ethno-cultural and theological orientations of the Muslim community, although many people attend the main city mosque, which is located in the central, student area and is a symbolic reminder of the key role that Islam plays in the social geography of contemporary Western societies.

The next pages will elaborate on the history of discriminatory attitudes towards visible minorities and Muslims in Scotland and will subsequently focus on Muslims’ specific day-to-day experiences in the fragile sociopolitical climate that has followed the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. In this sense, the increased visibility of Muslim religious identities will be posited to be a driver for the perceived stigmatisation during interactions with non-Muslims in everyday life and also at loci of security, such as airports, where Muslims feel an acute sense of social inequality, powerlessness and humiliation.

Discrimination against Scottish Muslims

Exclusionary practices based on racialised stereotypes against ‘coloured’ people have been reproduced in Scotland for centuries, at least since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: once fostered by tales of missionaries and Scottish soldiers returning from India and Africa; then exemplified by colour bans in dancing halls in the 1920s; and nowadays expressed through direct or indirect discrimination in various spheres of life, for example employment, housing and sociocultural entertainments (Wardak 2000). The post-9/11 discrimination against Muslims represents the consolidation of a shift from primarily racial to ethno-religious prejudice dating back to the Rushdie Affair in 1989, when Muslims across Great Britain, including Scotland (Maan 2014), started mobilising, being recognised and being dealt with not only as an ethnic group, but also, and especially, as a religious group (Bolognani 2009; Marranci 2008).

In the wake of 9/11, Scottish Muslims became the main ‘representatives’ of religious diversity within the Scottish landscape, a fate that they share with Muslims south of the border. Clegg and Rosie argue that ‘the attack on the World Trade Center in September 2001 marked a turning point from predominantly racial intolerance and abuse towards more religiously motivated attacks. People wearing distinctive religious dress or symbols are a particular target’ (Clegg and Rosie 2005). In the same study, all faith groups perceived Muslims to be the community most under pressure, especially after 9/11. Among the targets of the post-9/11 retaliation are also members of other ethnic and religious minority groups (for example, Sikh) who might mistakenly be considered Muslim (Qureshi 2007) and who have also been stopped and searched by the police based on the belief that they are Muslim (Parmar 2011). Discriminatory and racist attacks on Muslim people and symbols sharply increased after 9/11 (Hopkins 2007). For example, in Edinburgh a mosque was vandalised less than a month after the terrorist attacks on the United States and damages were valued at £20,000. In Glasgow, eggs were thrown at a mosque and a Muslim woman was spat at on the street (Hopkins and Smith 2008). In Lanarkshire, the contractor working on Central Lanarkshire Mosque received death threats and had to resign from the job in late 2002 (Maan 2014). In 2003, a group of young white people attacked a young Asian man who was walking to his local mosque in Glasgow.
Soon afterwards, gang problems and violent clashes between Asians and white people erupted in Pollokshields, including 'tit-for-tat fire bombings of shops and cars' (Sarwar 2016, p. 8). After the London bombings in 2005, Edinburgh experienced vandalism directed against one of its mosques and a serious attack on a young Scottish Pakistani man (Qureshi 2007), in a context in which Scotland as a whole suffered from increasing discriminatory treatment towards Muslims in schools and on the street (Maan 2014). Similarly, following a series of Islamic-State-inspired terrorist attacks that killed 129 people and injured 433 in Paris on 13 November 2015, the Scottish Muslim community suffered from increased racially and religiously motivated crimes. Police Scotland reportedly recorded over sixty religiously motivated crimes in the weeks after the attack (Leask 2016). The Strathclyde University Muslim Student Association received death threats (Brooks 2015). A cultural centre used by Muslims in Glasgow was firebombed (Gray 2015). The owner of a takeaway in Fife was assaulted and an Asian woman and her child were physically attacked (Duffy 2015).

Several Scottish people believe that the attempted bombing of Glasgow Airport in July 2007 increased intolerance towards Muslims (Homes et al. 2010). Moreover, almost half of Scottish people seem to believe that Scotland would lose its identity if the Muslim population increased, while 37 per cent consider Islam to be incompatible with Scottish life (ibid.). Approximately one in four (23 per cent) and one in seven (15 per cent) Scottish people, respectively, would be unhappy if a family member formed a relationship with a Muslim and consider Muslims to be unsuitable as primary school teachers (Ormston et al. 2011). Research conducted by Kidd and Jamieson (2011) confirms the fact that global events have instigated racial and religious discrimination. This is considered to be ‘a double burden’ since ‘Muslims experience unfair treatment and discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity and race, as well as in relation to their religious identity’ (ibid., p. 31). Kidd and Jamieson also notice that unfriendliness and hostility towards Muslims have been fairly common in Muslim areas of residence and on the street, while women have reported intrusive attention from men or sexual harassment. The 2007 protests against the provision of a plot of land for a new Muslim cemetery at Windlaw Farm near Carmunnock, a village in the suburb of Glasgow (Maan 2014), demonstrate the prejudice against visible Islamic symbols.

The social context is nonetheless not too gloomy and hope rests on the large percentage of Scottish people, 77 per cent, who consider themselves not to be racist at all (Scottish Executive 2006), and the 66 per cent who have positive views of Muslims (Homes et al. 2010). Overall, racism in Scotland is declining, while racial prejudice is falling across Great Britain (Ford 2008) – although this assessment may change in a post-Brexit context – and over seven in ten British people hold positive views towards Muslims (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2015). It is true that statistics recorded by the police in Scotland in 2013/2014 show a 4 per cent increase in racist incidents (4,807) compared to 2012/2013 (4,628) (Scottish Government 2013). But much of this increase is due to higher numbers of incidents involving white British people (1,423 in 2013/2014 compared to 1,139 in 2012/2013) rather than ethnic minorities. These figures must also be contextualised within an overall trend of decreasing numbers of racist incidents recorded by the police between 2006/2007 and 2013/2014 (Scottish Government 2015b). Yet, Pakistanis (20 per cent – that is, 1,107) and Bangladeshis (1 per cent – that is, 41), two predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, still constitute 21 per cent (1,148) of those who report racist incidents. They also contribute towards 35 per cent of the total population of wider Asian origin (Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and other Asian) who are victimised and complain about racism across the country. Urban areas tend to record higher numbers of racist incidents. In fact, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen are the three cities recording the highest proportion of racist incidents, respectively 20.7, 19.2 and 11.9 racist incidents for every 10,000
people in their local authority areas against a mean of nine racist incidents per 10,000 people in Scotland. Dundee is in line with the mean of nine racist incidents for every 10,000 people (Scottish Government 2015b). Religiously aggravated offences (Scottish Government 2015a and 2016) for conduct derogatory towards Islam under Section 74 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003 oscillated between fifteen and one hundred and thirty-four charges in the years between 2010 and 2015. Although a Scottish Government (2016) survey recorded an increase in reported offences, under-reporting still constitutes an issue (Meer 2015). Similarly, the problematic nature of disentangling religion from race and ethnicity makes it hard to provide an accurate picture of anti-Muslim sentiments.

Episodes of abuse and discrimination against Muslims have increased since 9/11 (Saeed 2015) and, as a consequence, daily encounters between Muslims and non-Muslims have suffered. Visible markers of Muslimness increase the likelihood of suffering from discrimination, harassment, marginalisation and employment difficulties. When coupled with the maintenance or adoption of foreign ethnic and/or Muslim norms and mannerisms, markers of Muslimness play an important role in reinforcing exclusionary processes on a cultural and social basis and placing Muslims within a discriminated against category. Furthermore, low-quality interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims promote non-positive behavioural intentions towards the former (Hutchison and Rosenthal 2011). In a study conducted by Hopkins et al. (2007), it appears that most Muslims would welcome increased contact with non-Muslim communities; however, it is necessary that people interacting with them do not misrecognise their identities or disrespect them under the influence of socially widespread prejudices and stereotypes.

Discrimination in everyday Scottish life

A consistent pattern observed throughout fieldwork with Muslims in Edinburgh relates to the ways in which distinctive body markers and visible ‘signs of Muslimness’ (for example, skin colour, beard, traditional clothes and hijab) may position them within an a priori stigmatised group. Other studies have found that ‘young Muslim men who have a beard and wear Islamic dress are likely to experience discrimination and marginalisation compared with those who do not’ (Hopkins 2009, p. 307). In this sense, the public display of negatively perceived cultural diversity could class Muslims as ‘discreted’ individuals through mere visual contact (for example, seeing a ‘coloured’ man who wears a long beard or a woman who wears a hijab) and without requiring communication to establish such diversity (Goffman 1990 [1963]). In this sense, the essentialisation of Muslimness may preclude the use of front stage techniques of self-presentation (Goffman 1990 [1959]) that would otherwise help Muslims to positively negotiate their multiple identities across different sociocultural spaces, ease interactions with non-Muslims and define their own social positioning on a more equal level. The way in which signs, or visible markers, of Muslimness can cast Muslims outside the realm of socially power-balanced relationships and accepted cultural boundaries due to the symbolic power of race and religion to signal social differences is also identified by Hopkins (2004a, 2004b) in his study of Pakistanis in Glasgow and Edinburgh in the early 2000s and this broadly follows other British (Spalek 2002; Allen 2014, 2015) and European (Choudhury et al. 2006) studies on the subject. Kyriakides et al.’s (2009) research in Glasgow further confirms that, when people only display ‘foreign Muslim signs’, extensively including foreign accents and non-mainstream mannerisms, these are perceived to be culturally problematic. However, the authors argue that when people utilise hybridised codes of cultural belonging, which rely upon both Scottish cultural norms, such as command of English and a Scottish accent (Virdee et al. 2006), and Muslim cultural norms, they can make claims of national belonging and be more easily included in society. Muslim hyper-visibility
forms both a trigger for ethno-religious discrimination and a catalyst for positive interest in, and support of, Muslimness. Ghedi, a Somali man, encapsulates the reality of being a member of a visible minority, particularly being a Muslim in a post-9/11 world, and the shift from a racial to an ethno-religious understanding of his identity:

Being a Muslim in Edinburgh has been difficult compared to back home. Over there, the majority of people are Muslim so it ‘forces’ you to be a Muslim. Here, Muslims are a minority and there is a minority issue. For example, people define Muslims by how you dress. If you are a Muslim man and you wear a *shalwar kameez*, it says that you are a Muslim even before you talk. If you wear a turban, again it is the same thing. If you have a beard, that is again the same thing. At the beginning, Muslims were treated as a racial group: people would say to you, ‘Paki’, as happened to me a number of times. Then, 9/11 changed things. If you have a beard and wear a *kameez*, they call you ‘Bin Laden’.

*(Ghedi, Somali man in his mid-fifties)*

A survey conducted with over 500 black and minority ethnic (BME) people in Scotland confirms that religion (44 per cent) and ethnicity (82 per cent) are perceived to drive discriminatory attitudes (Meer 2015). Of the same cohort, 31 per cent reported having experienced discrimination in Scotland between 2010 and 2015, particularly while using transport services and in the areas of employment and education. Surveys conducted in England and Wales also demonstrate that Muslims are among the most victimised group in racially motivated hate crimes (Corcoran et al. 2015). Leaving aside *loci* of security and interactions with the police for now, the workplace and the job market also appear to be areas of concern in other larger studies of Scottish Muslims (see Kidd and Jamieson 2011), since visibly presenting oneself as a Muslim is perceived as a potential hindrance in both reaching certain positions and securing a job. A few respondents in Edinburgh mentioned the absence of, if not the impossibility for society to even conceive, Muslims in positions of power due to the very essence of them being visibly Muslim. In other words, they believed that institutional discrimination could potentially hamper Muslims’ opportunities to access services and reach positions of authority and leadership. Arif, a Canadian Bangladeshi man, stresses this issue. He alleges that discrimination in Scotland is deeply institutionalised and seriously affects the life goals of highly educated and motivated individuals of ethnic minority origin. Problems with accessing services are also recorded in other research, where Muslims believe themselves to have experienced ‘greater barriers to [national] health service use in terms of the (negative) attitudes of receptionists and service opening hours compared with non-Muslims’ (Love et al. 2011, p. 3). Similarly, Raza, a Scottish Pakistani man in his early twenties, thinks that being a Muslim is a major impediment to reaching certain positions of institutional authority and leadership, as they are already disadvantaged in the labour market.

This line of thought is supported by a Muslim who works at the headquarters of the National Health Service in Edinburgh. He reports that there have been no Muslim directors or chief executives since his employment there. Some evidence to support these arguments is contained in a report on Scottish local councils, which found that the workforce does not reflect the size of the ethnic minority community (Hussain and Ishaq 2008). The Scottish Government also claimed that the country has no head or deputy head teacher from an ethnic minority background (BBC News 2015). Raza, a Scottish Pakistani man, is one of the very few respondents who maintain that exclusion, in this case from a position of authority, does not necessarily signify discrimination. Muslim exclusion from positions of leadership could derive from many other factors ranging from mere statistical reasons (non-Muslims largely outnumber Muslims in society) to meritocratic reasons.
Some other interviewees reported difficulties in negotiating their need to pray, for example being requested not to perform prayers during work time, or feeling ashamed to pray whenever non-Muslims are around in case they react in a negative fashion. Sarmad reported issues with a colleague who would interrupt and verbally abuse him during prayer breaks in the workplace. Nasha recounted a personal experience as a volunteer at a Christian caring organisation, which she had decided to leave after being explicitly requested not to perform prayers at work. In her own negative experience, Nasha was not able to negotiate her right to pray during lunch break, because prayers were allegedly considered to be offensive by the Christian organisation. Eventually, she had to resign. In the bleakest scenario, through the normative regulation of ethnic and religious values that are different from the dominant values of a cultural constituency, ‘certain cultural practices of the minority cultural groups become [social and cultural] crimes, subject to sanctions and penalties imposed by the dominant group or elite’ (Lemert 1972, p. 33).

Nasha’s experience demonstrates the potential for Muslim-related practices to be subject to discrimination from a majority that defines the boundaries of Muslim engagement with society. Other respondents argued that visible Muslim identities drive stigmatisation and exclusion. Alena mentioned occasions on which she had felt that the discrepancy between her virtual image and her real image could be a key impediment to job hunting. In other words, she claimed that she had routinely managed to make job contacts over the phone thanks to her Western-sounding name but had failed face-to-face interviews due to her hijab and her requests to perform prayers on Fridays:

Looking for jobs was a big hit for me. I could not help thinking that the hijab was the way you do not get jobs and I do not like to think that way but felt like that I was forced to think about it that way. I was also trying to tell myself that there is something about me that is not right for this job and not the hijab and all the rest but I also thought about the hijab. I was fine on paper and I used to get lots of interviews for jobs. But then I would go for the interview and would never get the job. I think that, because my name is Alena, they think I am okay but when they meet me everything changes.

(Alena, Palestinian woman in her late twenties)

Several other interviewees shared similar concerns in line with the findings of a study conducted by Kidd and Jamieson (2011) in the Central Belt that registered ‘fears about the possibility of facing . . . discrimination when looking for work’ (ibid., p. 52). Rebecca, a fully covered Scottish female convert to Islam, also laments a mismatch between the expected identity that she communicates during phone interactions and the visual identity that people ascertain during face-to-face interactions. The fact that visibly displaying religious symbols affects interactions with Scottish people is not simply a perception but finds support in the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2010 (Ormston et al. 2011). Of the surveyed respondents, 23 per cent maintained that a Muslim woman being interviewed for a job involving contact with customers should be asked by the prospective employer to remove her hijab at work. A few interviewees shared other, similar experiences. Arif recounted his own experience as a temporary worker in a legal aid office where he believed he had been constantly assigned the hardest admin tasks, while his colleagues had been quickly promoted and had been given better duties. Akhtar pinpoints this very issue by arguing that Muslims could receive differential treatment simply because of their religious and ethnic identities:
I think that sometimes, even if you have the best qualifications out there, they say that you do not get a job because you are not what they are looking for or they tell you a simple excuse that can be applicable to anyone. However, because of the way things are, I would not be chosen because I am Pakistani, because I am Muslim. It is not necessarily right to do it but I do not blame it either. This is because of the ways the media perceive Islam, the way in which things have been done.

(Akhtar, Scottish Pakistani man in his early twenties)

Akhtar’s words resonate with wider community perceptions of an a priori prejudice towards Muslims and Islam, which is often blamed on the media and far-right political parties. There is a diffuse sense of British media negativity around Muslims that some Scottish people accept uncritically. Encounters between Muslims and non-Muslims reveal the underlying sense of discomfort that some people have developed towards Muslims in a post-9/11 world. It is true that Muslims feel fairly safe when dealing with non-Muslim friends and acquaintances because these people are able to avoid either stereotyping Muslim communities or making them pay a penalty for the wrongdoing of a tiny minority of Islamist terrorists. Large-scale studies indicate that only 20 per cent of Scottish people hold negative views of Muslims (Homes et al. 2010) and that those who discriminate against Muslims are typically low-skilled male workers, pensioners, elders and Conservatives (Hussain and Miller 2006; see also Ormston et al. 2011). However, the display of a visibly Muslim identity, particularly in a post-9/11 world, affects the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. Hussain and Miller’s (2006) study of Pakistanis in Scotland reveals that the majority of their respondents (61 per cent) believed ordinary people to be the most prejudiced Scots. Only a minority (23 per cent) of their respondents mentioned politicians and officials. Akhtar sheds further light on the perceived hostility suffered from Scottish people:

Obviously due to recent circumstances it is more and more difficult for me to express myself as a person, not so much of a Pakistani background, but of a Muslim background. It has become more and more difficult. For example, my sister wears the hijab. I know that these are little things that people might perceive as silly but, like, when she gets on the bus people look at her. I know how it was before and I know how it is now and if you ask anybody they will tell you the same thing – I found myself being treated differently.

(Akhtar, Scottish Pakistani man in his early twenties)

Certain expressions of cultural prejudice, such as staring at members of other ethnic groups on the bus, are often problematic to assess and evaluate objectively, and can relate to forms of behaviour other than pure racism (see also Kidd and Jamieson 2011). But discriminatory attitudes, such as being called a ‘terrorist’ or a ‘Paki’ and other forms of verbal abuse, are unequivocally suffered by many, predominantly male, visibly Muslim people in Edinburgh and across Scotland (see Kidd and Jamieson 2011). Verbal abuse tends to take place on the street, which forms the location recording the highest number of general racist incidents between 2004/2005 and 2013/2014 (Scottish Government 2015a). This finding is in line with Kidd and Jamieson’s (2011) study, which reports Scottish Muslims’ experiences of hostility and unfriendliness both on the streets and in local neighbourhoods. But Kidd and Jamieson also notice more positive relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims, particularly in colleges and schools. This element should not be underestimated. It is well known that the formation of national identities passes through the educational system and that ‘in Scotland it is one of the three national
institutions which were preserved in the Union of 1707 and continued to preserve a sense of Scottish “national” identity while not colliding with British state identity’ (Weber n.d., p. 8).

Scottish Muslims often claim that, besides the media and the post-9/11 climate, the low exposure to ethno-religious diversity of Scottish people living in some parts of the country (see Kidd and Jamieson 2011) is to blame for discriminatory attitudes. Troublingly, some Muslims are routinely victims of serious abuse, such as assaults, as happened to one of Arif’s friends. Other similarly serious incidents involved a female respondent having her hijab pulled off on the street and a mosque being vandalised in the aftermath of 9/11. A study conducted between 2013 and 2015 and involving 100 Muslims across Scotland (Hopkins et al. 2015) further recorded several incidents of verbal and physical abuse suffered by Scottish Muslims. In a notable incident, a man entered Taj Madina mosque in Dundee and destroyed framed prayers (BBC News 2016). On the positive side, many Muslims who took part in both the author’s own primary research and in Hussain and Miller’s (2006) study perceive discrimination to be less serious than in England. Yet, ethno-religious discrimination, even when it results only in a few minor incidents, appears to take an emotional and psychological toll on Muslims. Muslims are often apt to consider the complexities of their fragile position in society, take into account the generally positive experiences that they have had and avoid letting a few negative experiences shape their overall perceptions of life in Scotland. But some Muslims have been badly affected by perceived and real discrimination. People such as Arif are resigned to the idea that discriminatory incidents are routine experiences in Scotland. But while ordinary everyday experiences are not homogeneous across the Scottish Muslim population, Muslims’ perceptions of discrimination at airports converge. As crucial loci of security, where any post-9/11 worry about an impending Islamist terrorist attack shows itself, airports are the most contested social spaces among the Scottish Muslim community.

Discrimination at Scottish airports

Stories of negative experiences at Scottish airports abound among the predominantly male Muslims interviewed and surveyed across different studies: primary research conducted by the author in Edinburgh; wider Scottish research conducted by Kidd and Jamieson (2011); and media reports (Herald Scotland 2011; Naysmith 2015). Many Edinburgh Muslims have either themselves experienced or know relatives or friends who have been subjected to perceived undue targeting or harsh treatment when leaving from or arriving at Scottish airports. In 2011, Humza Yousaf and Aamer Anwar publicly lamented that South Asian men had been regularly stopped at airports (Herald Scotland 2011). This has become a typical narrative among Scottish Muslims. Muslims often consider ethno-religious profiling to be a main driver for airport checks and stops and searches and question the operational randomness of security activities. They believe that Muslims qua Muslims are targeted due to the fears associated with their cultural and religious difference:

I have never been stopped at the train station but I have been stopped and searched at the airport. It is always a ‘random’ [sarcastic] search. . . . Random search – how come I am always the one randomly stopped?

(Babar, young Scottish Pakistani man in his mid-twenties)

Stop and search at airports is a widespread issue. People are getting stopped. We get stopped. We see it ourselves. Not once but twice, three times. We see it a number of times and then we realise that it has become part of our life. The concern is the actual questioning and the
Within the social space that is constructed around the perceived stigmatisation of visible diversity, Muslims could end up being placed in a position of unequal standing before police and security officers. These actors operate as the human tools of the securitisation of Muslims and represent what Wacquant (2009) argues are the law and order wing of the state, which employs penal means to deal with social ‘problems’. Other research conducted across Scotland confirms that Muslims believe that the ‘frequency and nature of airport stops signals that . . . [they] are targeted as a group and regarded as a dangerous “other”’ (Blackwood 2015, p. 258).

The securitisation of Muslims has produced several effects. In line with the findings of Blackwood et al.’s (2012) study, these effects converge in a mixture of disempowerment, anger, humiliation, alienation and distrust towards security authorities. As Blackwood et al. demonstrate, ‘Muslim airport stories’ are often spread, shared and socially represented within Muslim communities. Such stories present negative encounters with airport security staff and perceptions that Muslims occupy a position of relative powerlessness, where (a) Muslim identities are misrepresented and misunderstood; (b) for those people who uphold them, Scottish or British national identities are partially denied, since Muslims are treated as social aliens; and (c) ‘respectable identities’, which are based on high social status within the Muslim community, are not recognised by wider society. The authors further suggest that this three-fold identity denial impacts on both Muslims’ actions and perceptions of their position in society. This process of identity misrecognition, which is the absence of others’ recognition of a person’s understanding of who he or she is (Taylor 1994) and which is promoted by the hyper-visibility of Muslim identities (Hopkins and Blackwood 2011), can hamper the way in which people are able to play out their own ways of being British, Scottish or Muslim during social interactions with airport security staff. The most significant negative consequence of misrecognition is the mirroring back of ‘a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture’ (Taylor 1994, p. 25) to those whose identity is denied. As Blackwood (2015, p. 257) postulates, ‘this is particularly . . . [consequential] for minority group members (or those in low power positions) who are especially attuned to and affected by what they think other groups think about them’.

Chanda, a Bangladeshi woman, offers one of the most powerful accounts of being subject to the securitisation of visible Muslimness and describes her emotional state in walking through airports as follows:

I feel as if I wanted to vanish. If I am at Edinburgh Airport, I feel so bad. Why me? I feel hundreds of thousands of pairs of eyes looking at me. This is very damaging sometimes. It is very scary, very upsetting. I feel very empty, very isolated, I feel like crying. It is such a bad feeling.

(Chanda, Bangladeshi woman in her mid-forties)

Chanda’s feelings are not unique among Scottish Muslims and add up to a perception that airports are detrimental social spaces for understanding one’s positioning within society. This perception illustrates the emotional barriers that can hamper the negotiation of identities and rights on an equal basis with security officers. Significantly, it explains why some Muslims in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee decide to utilise stratagems to minimise encounters with
airport authorities, including avoiding others’ gaze and changing one’s posture (Blackwood et al. 2015). Hamid, a middle-aged Pakistani man, claims that police officers allegedly abused their position of power to try to extract information that he did not possess during an airport interview. A British passport-holder, Hamid, further claims to have been harassed and threatened with deportation to Pakistan. He paints a very bleak picture of airports:

Stop and search is a big issue at airports. It is really a big issue at airports. I would use the word ‘harassment’ because on a plane that has 200 people only those who have a beard or are Asians get stopped. I am using these words here deliberately: I use the word ‘harassment’ and I also use the word ‘victimisation’ because certain people are targeted.

(Hamid, Pakistani man in his mid-fifties)

Institutional mistrust as a consequence of both the post-9/11 political and military tensions with Muslim countries, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, and the domestic policing of Muslim people runs high in Scotland. It particularly affects male members of the Muslim community who have had more frequent contact with the police and security authorities. There is a danger that post-9/11 security practices could depict law enforcement agencies as being dismissive of Muslims’ belonging to the country. Overt abuse of power can only reinforce Muslims’ perceptions that the security system is hostile. The frustration, anger and humiliation of travelling to or from Scottish airports have prompted some to look for different travelling arrangements:

I know of people that got fed up with travelling by air as a result of that. I think that initially it was far from random.

(Ali, British Pakistani man in his mid-forties)

I have had so many bad experiences – and friends of mine too – at airports here in Scotland, both in Edinburgh and in Glasgow, that I do not even want to fly in to Scottish airports anymore. I am serious. I will go to Manchester. I will go to wherever.

(Arif, Canadian Bangladeshi man in his early thirties)

The fact that a number of Muslim people ‘got fed up with travelling by air’ is confirmed by Blackwood’s (2015) research that found that avoiding particular airports, travelling less frequently and playing down Muslim identities are common strategies used to avoid unwelcome attention. This situation reached its highest point with the boycott of Glasgow International Airport in 2011 (Campsie and Leask 2011). Certainly, tensions between Muslims and the police have not exploded in episodes of violence as in England (Malik 2011). But it is remarkable that some Muslims decided to boycott a key Scottish airport as a result of what they perceive to be widespread discrimination and hostility.

Conclusion

In an age of hostility and distrust towards Islam, discrimination against visible Muslims on the street, in the workplace and at loci of security is not surprising. The emergence of scapegoats, onto which society can pour its fears and insecurities, is not a novel event. Jews in Nazi Germany, communists in the United States after World War II and gays in the 1980s played a role that, at least symbolically, resonates with the discrimination faced by numerous peaceful and law-abiding Muslims in the past fifteen years. A new way to ‘unite a faltering civic society by invoking a common threat . . . and deflect attention away from the genuine causes of insecurity’
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(Vaughan 2002, p. 205), exaggerated cultural worries about Muslims represent a historical continuum. Visibly displaying a Muslim identity affects social interactions with some Scots. An a priori negative categorisation of Muslims has restricted them to an ethno-religious diversity that is considered lesser by wider society. Power-imbalanced relations with airport security officers, who represent the symbolic post-9/11 worries about visible Muslimness, have affected the social confidence and sense of belonging of some community members. As Blackwood’s (2015) research unequivocally demonstrates, people’s perceptions that authorities treat them disrespectfully leads to a loss of trust and confidence, as well as passive non-compliance and active defiance.

But while it is true that Muslims have suffered prejudice, hostility and discrimination, the case put forward by Hopkins (2004a, p. 91) that racism ‘is an everyday experience for many of Scotland’s black and minority ethnic population’ needs to be reconsidered. Trends of decreases in recorded racism, which nonetheless still does exist and impacts predominantly on Muslims, and the specific locales where discrimination happens must both be carefully considered. It is also important to contextualise racism within those porous Scottish sociocultural boundaries that have the potential to shape a fully integrative Scottishness and to appreciate that Muslim hyper-visibility is not only a trigger for ethno-religious discrimination but also a catalyst for attracting the curiosity of non-Muslims towards Islam. Such forces have also allowed Muslims and non-Muslims to come together and challenge both global stereotyping and local discrimination through acts of resilience, engagement and mutual interest.

Notes

1 The chapter uses various types of data, including qualitative data collected during a doctoral research project on Muslims in Scotland at the University of Edinburgh (2010–2014). Such data comprise 39 interviews with a balanced pool of Muslims and protracted participant observation in Edinburgh in town.

2 Religion is not recorded in these statistics, thus making it difficult to quantify the exact extent of discrimination against Muslims.

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