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Flying while Muslim

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Introduction

Oh no, we’re in trouble
TSA always wanna burst my bubble
Always get a random check when I rock the stubble

Swet Shop Boys, T5

The expression ‘flying while Muslim’ is now widely used to capture a set of intimidating and humiliating experiences Muslims report having, when travelling in non-Muslim countries (Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher 2015). Increasingly, airport authorities (as well as airlines) are being challenged to account for these experiences, and to address discriminatory policies and practices that may contribute (Khaleeli 2016). Yet, some scholars have questioned whether there really is a problem; even if Muslims experience disproportionately more stops, is it discrimination if people are just doing their job (e.g. Greer 2010)? Others accept that there is discrimination but question both the feasibility and the desirability of doing anything about it; surely the hurt feelings of a few is an acceptable price to pay for the security of the many (e.g. Higgins, Gabbidon and Jordan 2008; Ravich 2010)?

In this chapter I draw on research conducted with British Muslims and airport authorities, as well as wider reportage of Muslim experiences, to examine what is wrong with these arguments and why we should indeed be concerned about Islamophobia at the airport (Blackwood 2015; Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2015; Mohammad 2016). This argument is developed in three sections. In the first section, I summarise the findings from research conducted with Scottish Muslims on their encounters with airport authorities and briefly discuss why people’s experiences of injustice and identity misrecognition in the airport are psychologically painful and consequential for their perceptions of themselves and their social relations. In the second, I examine how organisational context and practices of surveillance in airports may warrant Muslims’ claims that, despite authorities’ claims to the contrary, there is indeed discriminatory treatment. Finally, I consider why we should be concerned and highlight some of the implications of Muslims’ experiences for their (dis)engagement as citizens and more specifically in relation to authorities.
Scottish Muslims’ encounters in airports

Between 2009 and 2012, I along with my colleagues, Nick Hopkins and Stephen Reicher, conducted research with Scottish Muslims in which we asked about day-to-day experiences with Scottish authorities (see Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher 2013a for a fuller description of the research). We heard a wide range of stories about people’s encounters; many were positive and indeed, we discerned some pride in police-Muslim relations in Scotland, which many compared favourably to England (see also Bonino 2015). What stood out, however, was a widely shared and universally negative experience of airports. In brief, our research identified a ‘Muslim Airport Story’ involving anxiety in the anticipation of travel and when approaching security; hypervigilance associated with believing that all eyes are on you because you are Muslim; humiliation when pulled aside in front of other passengers; and powerlessness in a context where because one may be judged as ‘other’ and dangerous, it is unsafe to ask questions or complain (Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2015).

There were a number of features of the ‘Muslim Airport Story’ that we believed warranted focussing our analysis on this site. First, this story was widely shared among our interviewees and united older community members (including those who were in some instances working with authorities) with those more typically subject to scrutiny (e.g. young males: Gray and Manning 2014). Second, whereas our interviewees were often uncertain about how to attribute negative treatment in other contexts, all were certain that the basis for their treatment in airports was that they were Muslim. Thus, there was a collective consciousness about discrimination based on Muslim identity that was linked explicitly to airports. Third, and central to this Chapter, these experiences were seen as undermining trust and confidence in authorities and as compromising relations with the wider British community.

A strong body of evidence supports concerns about negative interactions with authorities contributing to the erosion of British Muslims’ trust and confidence in authorities (e.g. Alam and Husband 2013; Awan 2012; Choudhury and Fenwick 2011; Kundnani 2009; Spalek and Weeks 2016; Tyler and Wakslak 2004). Much of the social psychological research in this area is informed by Tyler and Lind’s (1992) relational model of procedural justice (e.g. Bradford, Jackson and Stanko 2009; Jackson and Sunshine 2006). According to this model, confidence in, and cooperation with the police and wider societal authorities, is shaped by people’s beliefs about whether authorities exercise their power in accordance with four principles – neutrality (treatment is fair and unbiased); voice (views are invited and listened to); dignity and respect (rights are recognised); and motives (genuine and trustworthy). What is central to these dynamics, and what links people’s experiences with authorities to their relations with the wider community, is group-based identity. Specifically, when people share a common group identity (e.g. British identity) they expect fair and just treatment (Tyler and Lind 1992). The corollary to this is that the violation of this expectation by representatives of that group (e.g. societal authorities), amounts to being told that one is not actually regarded as a bone fide group member (Sunshine and Tyler 2003).

Research conducted with Muslim communities in Australia, Canada, and the UK supports these processes and their effects. Specifically, Zine (2002) found that US border security practices of fingerprinting and photographing Muslims born outside Canada, were experienced as challenging people’s previously taken for granted ‘Canadianness’. By contrast, Madon, Murphy and Cherney (2016) found that policing that was explicitly based on procedural justice principles strengthened Australian Muslims’ sense of connection to mainstream Australian society. Finally, in our research with Scottish Muslims, many of our interviewees understood their treatment in terms of a violation of their right to be regarded as equals and treated with dignity.
and respect; and spoke of this experience in terms of a denial of their Britishness (Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher 2013a).

An important insight from literature on the experience of having one’s identities denied or misrecognised is that these experiences matter not just for what they communicate about how one is seen, but for what this in turn means for how one can act (Honneth 2008; Neville, Viard and Turner 2015). For instance, if a person sees themselves as British, liberal and law-abiding, but there are circumstances where those around them do not, then acting on the basis of these self-definitions may be less than straightforward. This was most poignantly illustrated by a Muslim man who, in explaining that he would not feel safe to intervene in a crisis at the airport, lamented: ‘it’s not a nice way to be, I want to do good in this world and when there are certain places that you’re restricted from doing that, it’s not comfortable’ (Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher 2015). Thus, the denial of one’s valued identities impacts on one’s agency – on the ability to act in ways of one’s choosing.

As is implicit in the above quote, the issue of identity denial and misrecognition is not simply about how one was viewed by authorities. What also mattered was that in the context of wider representations of Muslims as potential terrorists, being publicly positioned as suspect was experienced as inviting others to be complicit in viewing one as alien and suspect (Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher 2013a). Wider research on police-community encounters also speaks to these concerns. For instance, in FitzGerald’s (1999; see also Miller, Bland and Quinton 2001) research with young people in London, a particular source of grievance was the humiliation of being stopped by police outside work, outside the Mosque, and more generally in public spaces. Importantly, the experience of public humiliation is not just about ‘hurt feelings’; it is consequential for public support. Thus, in our interviews, being publicly positioned as ‘other’ created a sense of isolation and of being cut-off from the potential support of fellow citizens, including from fellow Muslims (Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher 2012; Neuhauser 2011; Ginges and Atran 2008).

Finally, finding that those who are proud of their British identity may be particularly affected (or affected in particular ways) is consistent with research concerning the experience of identity denial conducted with a number of ethnic and religious minorities including Asian, African, and Cuban Americans (Barlow, Taylor and Lambert 2000; Cheryan and Monin 2005; Meer, Martineau and Thompson 2012). It also tallies with findings at a Midwestern airport (Sindhav, Holland, Rodie, Adidam and Pol 2006) and at Ben Gurion International Airport outside Tel Aviv (Hasisi, Margalioth and Orgad 2012; Hasisi and Weisburd 2011). The latter research was conducted at the post-security check point at Ben Gurion and is particularly instructive. Israeli-Arab passengers were found to view security procedures as less legitimate than Israeli-Jewish passengers; and this difference was fully accounted for by specific practices that targeted Arabs. That is to say, Israeli-Arab passengers felt that they were treated less equally and this perception appears to have been warranted with close to half of Israeli-Arab passengers having their suitcase opened for ‘additional’ security checks compared with less than ten percent of Israeli-Jews. The authors concluded that it was not the case that the perception of discrimination was easily triggered; it depended on security checks that were of a clearly discriminatory nature.

Is there really a problem in airports?

Since publishing the above research, concerns about Muslim treatment both in airports and by airlines have not abated. Indeed, if anything, they have become more prominent in social media and in the mainstream press. The hashtag #flyingwhilemuslim is perhaps the clearest manifestation of heightened recognition of a shared story; moreover, it provides a platform for sharing
Experiences and mobilising consciousness and dissent (van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2017). Stories that have received especially wide attention are ones where people have been removed from planes for such seemingly innocuous reasons as speaking or texting in Arabic, using the word ‘inshallah’, reading a book about Syria, and even grappling with maths equations (Khaleeli 2016; Mohammad 2016; Revesz 2016). In January 2017, the US President signed an executive order banning travel from seven Muslim-majority countries (Diamond 2017). What ensued was chaos as thousands of travellers were stranded in airports, unable to board planes for the US or turned back at points of entry (Einashe 2017). While some in the US and elsewhere expressed outrage at what they saw as the discriminatory singling out of Muslims; others defended the measure on the grounds that the ban did not target Muslims (merely the countries from which terrorists hail), and that tightening control over one’s borders is a reasonable response to the terrorism threat (Linderman 2017). For many Muslims in the UK, both the experiences and the justifications were familiar but now writ large and seen as further deepening the climate of suspicion and hostility affecting their travel (Ross and Sherwood 2017).

Reflecting the above debate, one of the principal complaints expressed by British Muslims about airports relates to the experience of multiple stops. People’s experiences of these stops are attributed to a bias that conflates Islamic beliefs with support for terrorism (Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher 2013a); and are seen as evidence for profiling on the basis of ethnicity and religion. In personal communications with senior police and airport officials in the UK, the response to these complaints has always been the same. First, UK airport officials do not profile on the basis of religion or ethnicity but are ‘intelligence-led’. Second, to the extent that Muslims experience disproportionate stops, this can be explained in terms of legitimate profiling criteria such as travelling to a listed destination. In order to understand these conflicting perspectives, we need to consider both the legislative and organisational context of airports, as well as the day-to-day practices entailed in the surveillance of this space.

Below I draw on research conducted in 2013 with senior and front-line personnel from each of the agencies at a mid-sized British airport (police and intelligence officers, border force, security, and airline agency staff). The purpose of the research was to gain insight into how airport personnel themselves made sense of the kinds of negative interactions Muslims described having in the airports; and to identify aspects of the airport context that may contribute to Muslims’ negative experiences and construals (Blackwood 2015).

The legislative and institutional context of surveillance in the UK

The Terrorism Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2010 are two pieces of legislation that are particularly important to the policing of UK Airports. Under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000 examining officers are authorised to stop any person at a UK port in order to ascertain whether they are involved in terrorism. Examining officers may question the persons stopped, inspect their documents, search them or their vehicle, and detain them for up to six hours. The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful for any officer to discriminate against, harass or victimise on the grounds of a protected characteristic (including ethnicity and religion). UK Government figures show there has been a decline in stops and searches under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act from 85,000 a year in 2009/10 to 18,103 in the year ending March 2017. In these most recent figures, non-White persons constitute 68% of those stopped (Home Office 2017b; Revesz 2016).

The UK’s previous Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, David Anderson QC, has credited the decline in Schedule 7 stops, in part, to clearer guidance in the Code of Practice for Examining officers on matters that have been a source of grievance (Home Office 2015).
For instance, the Code of Practice now clearly stipulates that: Using background and religion (alone or in combination) as a criteria for stopping people is not acceptable; people who are stopped must be treated with respect and courtesy; care must be taken to minimise embarrassment and discomfort; and where possible people should be assisted with their onward journey. As outlined in the first part of this Chapter, these changes are consistent with procedural justice principles (Tyler and Lind 1992) and signal a positive political and legislative response to Muslim concerns.

There are, however, a number of problems with taking such statistics and arguments at face value. Most importantly, not all stops are Schedule 7 stops. While only designated ‘examining officers’ are authorised to conduct Schedule 7 stops, other authorities may conduct screening interviews to determine whether someone should be referred to an examining officer. Where someone is not referred, there is no requirement to record the interview. Thus, we cannot expect to gain a complete and accurate picture of how much scrutiny Muslims are actually given. There are, however, aspects of the organisational context within which scrutiny in airports occurs, and some common practices, which may shed light on why Muslims continue to experience airports as hostile environments. Below I present two contributing factors drawn from my airport research (see Kirschenbaum et al. 2012 for a more detailed analysis of why airport practice may deviate from rules and procedures).

**Surveillance saturation**

Airports are spaces saturated with surveillance. Unlike many other environments, there are multiple authorities and therefore multiple opportunities for people to be scrutinised and stopped (Kirschenbaum et al. 2012). To take the example of the airport in which I conducted my research, points at which departing passengers could encounter authorities included: (a) check-in where airline agents routinely question passengers about the contents of their baggage; (b) the ‘kiss-and-fly’ point where passengers could be challenged about oversized bags; (c) passport control where documentation is scrutinised; (d) airport security entailing the removal of clothes and random searches; (e) a special branch desk placed in the security hall; and (f) the boarding gate and on-board the aircraft where aircrew members can have passengers removed. On arrival, passengers run the gauntlet of (g) presenters in the Immigration hall; (h) an immigration check point where passengers may be directed to a holding room; (i) the holding room itself and rooms for strip search; (j) another special branch desk positioned behind the immigration check; (k) the baggage hall in which customs officers patrol with dogs; and (l) the customs declaration point.

In addition, all areas of the airport were fitted with CCTV and patrolled by police and other dedicated security officers, including Behaviour Detection Officers (BDOs). Moreover, frontline airport police have a role in responding to other authorities as well as the travelling public; and in encouraging other airport authorities, businesses and passengers to observe and report ‘suspicious’ behaviour. When asked what airport businesses would be instructed to look out for, one officer explained: ‘any kind of activity that seems out of the normal and they’re down there every day so they know what’s normal and what isn’t’. Thus, there are a range of potential actors involved in ‘sounding the alarm’ and the criterion for doing so is ambiguous and subjective. The implications of this are clear in media stories which cite passengers feeling ‘uneasy’ or ‘uncomfortable’ as reasons for Muslims being prevented from boarding or being removed from aircraft (Khaleeli 2016; Mohammad 2016; Revesz 2016).

Taken together, the above suggests that Muslim concerns about constant surveillance in the airport and the potential for authorities to act not just on their own prejudices, but on
the prejudices of others, are well founded. There is also evidence for the actions of authorities contributing to others’ prejudices through inviting and validating suspicions based on people’s ‘intuitions’ (see also Choudhury and Fenwick 2011; Kundnani 2009). This is despite a legal duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to: (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not; and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not. Some front-line airport staff expressed a keen awareness and discomfort about public prejudice directed at Muslims; for instance, one police officer expressed frustrations about non-Muslim passengers’ displays of hostility towards Muslim passengers following the terrorist attack at Glasgow airport. But it was not evident whether and how staff would (or could) act to protect Muslim passengers from hostility and advance the positive goals of equal opportunity and good relations (Blackwood 2015).

Reliance on ‘behaviour detection’

One of the grounds on which someone can be stopped and searched under Schedule 7, is ‘observation of an individual’s behaviour’ (Home Office 2015). In the US and in the UK, airports have relied on the deployment of specialist, Behaviour Detection Officers (BDOs) whose job is to unobtrusively observe passengers and detect behavioural signs of mal-intent. Although official information on the UK scheme is difficult to access, it was mentioned frequently in my research as playing a vital role in detecting people who are acting suspiciously. It has also been mentioned favourably by David Anderson QC as contributing to a reduced reliance on ‘intuitive stops’ (Anderson 2015). There is more information about the US scheme (SPOT: Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques) on which the UK scheme is based; perhaps because this has been the subject of controversy (Blandón-Gitlin, Fenn, Masip and Yoo 2014; Halsey 2014; Meyer 2010; Weinberger 2010). In the US, there have been complaints from within the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) that the program has ‘become a magnet for racial profiling’ (Schmidt and Lichtblau 2012). There have also been a number of reviews including by the US Government Accountability Office (2011, 2013) which have called into question the science claims on which behaviour detection schemes are based and the potential for these schemes to facilitate bias and violate privacy. In essence, the concern is that even if one is able to detect ‘unusual’ behaviour, determining motive or intent (for instance, whether someone is anxious about a family reunion or planning a terrorist attack) is more difficult and subject to bias.

Regardless of whether or not we should have confidence in BDOs to accurately identify those requiring additional attention, my research suggested that how BDOs’ decision-making is understood by other staff may be consequential for their own practices (Blackwood 2015). When asked about what BDOs were looking for, there was the suggestion that the BDOs would be relying on ‘intuition’ or what is referred to as ‘thick professionalism’ (Gundhus 2013). The following extract was in response to probing one police officer on this question:

I’m not entirely sure exactly what it is they’re looking for. Some of them are just your usual sort of criminal radar, you know? That guy’s acting shifty, he’s not looking at me, every time I look at him he’s looking away’, you know, that kind of thing.

On the surface some reliance on the observation of whether someone looks ‘shifty’ might appear to be unexceptional; after all, why should it lead to greater targeting of Muslims? On deeper inspection, it becomes questionable once we consider both the potential biases of those doing the looking, and the effects that believing yourself or your group to be the target of
surveillance has on how people behave. Reports on anti-Muslim sentiment and hate crimes (particularly in the aftermath of terrorist incidents: Home Office 2017a, 2017b; National Police Chief’s Council 2017; Zempi and Awan 2016) coupled with research on the treatment of Muslims as a ‘suspect community’ (e.g. Pantazis and Pemberton 2009, 2011) warrant concern about community-wide and more specific police bias directed towards Muslims. Moreover, research on the psychological and physiological effects of frequent exposure to the kinds of micro-aggressions that Muslims face in their day-to-day lives (Smith, Allen and Danley 2007), and more specifically, research on behavioural responses (Mythen, Walklate, and Khan 2009), alerts us to the potential for Muslims to be acting in what might be considered ‘shifty’ ways. For instance, take this young man in our research who commented:

I will change the way I look at people. I will try and avoid eye contact with staff at the airport, at the duty free department and things like that. The way I walk, how I carry my bag. What I carry with me.

This account of avoiding eye contact and not wearing markers of Muslim identity was mentioned frequently in our research. We also find frequent reference to this in media accounts of people’s experiences. As the lyrics that opened this paper attest, for young Muslim men, the notion that one will ‘always get a random check when I rock the stubble’ is a recognisable experience. In a similar vein, Mythen, Walklate and Khan (2009, p. 749) describe Muslim men’s ‘performances of safety’ such as ‘reducing the use of Urdu’ and keeping an ‘acceptable European regulation length beard’; and Hickman, Thomas, Nickels and Silvestri (2012) showed that both Irish and Muslim responses to counter-terrorism measures included self-silencing and avoidance of public spaces. Thus, what is striking is that not only are practices of behavioural observation questionable in terms of bias; but they may be leading to changes in behaviour that render them even less reliable (Ergün, Açikel and Turhan 2017).²

Should we be concerned about Islamophobia at the airport?

Establishing the precise degree to which Muslims experience discrimination in UK airports may be difficult. There can be little doubt, however, that ‘flying’ is a more fraught undertaking for British Muslims than it is for non-Muslims. In this section I want to return to the question of how Muslims are affected by their airport experiences. But here I want to focus on just some of the changes in behaviours that may signal a withdrawal from social participation and engagement.

Deciding to travel less frequently was one consequence that some Muslims in our research commented on with a degree of regret. For instance, one of our interviewees had always wanted to go to Disneyland but didn’t want the ‘hassle’ associated with US airports (Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher 2015). In light of the Trump ‘travel ban’ the Muslim Council of Britain (Einashe 2017) has suggested that many more British Muslims will be deterred from traveling to the US; both from fear and also as a political response to their ‘othering’. Writing in The New York Times, Ismail Einashe (2017) recounts the concerns of an elementary school teacher in London, Ms Abokor, who says ‘I don’t want to risk being turned away or having a hard time getting in a place that does not want my people, then you don’t deserve my tourist money.’ In some respects this might seem a trivial consequence. Yet, it reflects a sense in which some Muslims’ ability to live the full and active lives of a ‘global’ citizen are constrained; and also signals a change in social relations where some citizens find themselves in conflict with those authorities they hold responsible.
A second feature of people’s accounts is the effects on relations with airport authorities specifically. At the beginning of the chapter I discussed the consequences of perceiving authorities’ actions to be unfair and illegitimate for trust and confidence. Here I want to focus on the implications for subsequent interactions with authorities. These may be hard to gauge and we would expect people’s behavioural responses to vary; for instance, some of our interviewees cited a loss of confidence and trust in airport authorities as a reason for passive non-compliance while for others it was seen as warranting active defiance (Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher 2015). Moreover, this sometimes varied depending on the contingencies within a particular context. Thus, we found that even the most proudly ‘British’ and ‘respectable’ Muslims (including those working with counter-terrorism police) described circumstances in the airport where they considered withholding information about themselves or others from the authorities, and sometimes even lying, to be both legitimate and necessary. Indeed failure to cooperate with airport authorities was sometimes represented as a moral duty and entirely compatible with British identity and commitment.

When presenting such examples to frontline airport staff, one response was to question the character, the maturity, and the commitment to the national interest of those who complain or fail to cooperate (Blackwood 2015). Indeed, in a focus group with airport personnel, it was explained that any sign of non-cooperation or of questioning or challenging authorities, would be seen as a sign of having something to hide and, moreover, as warranting additional scrutiny. What this may fail to recognise is Muslims themselves share the wider community’s fears regarding terrorism and are often willing to accept inconvenient and personally intrusive measures to guarantee national security (Davis and Silver 2004). Hence, where those measures are perceived to be unfair or ineffective, Muslims may in turn question airport authorities’ own characters, their competence, and their commitment to the national interest. This is particularly well illustrated by a young man who had spent time in the British Forces, believed in the importance of discipline, hierarchy and authority, and was critical of fellow Muslims who he saw as unwilling to accept the sacrifices entailed in stringent national security measures. But these qualities made him even more critical of those authorities he judged as acting illegitimately and abusing their power. Commenting on an experience involving his grandmother at border control his disdain was plain:

I was like there’s no need for that, the only reason you’re saying that is to make yourself feel important and then we have to start begging you. But in my head, that made him less important.

Moreover, he draws our attention to the often subtle processes involved in the loss of trust and respect. Below he articulates a shift in his relationship with authorities to one that is marked by inauthenticity:

I don’t sort of listen to Authority figures now because I respect them. That sort of disappeared and it’s just I think I respect you out of sort of like a formality, like I have to respect you. So I have to listen to what you say, but it doesn’t mean I respect you on the inside.

This description of a disjuncture between public expression of respect for authorities and private disdain speaks powerfully to the hidden nature of processes of disengagement and alienation. In recent years, research on the consequences of power asymmetries for how interactions between majority and minority members are both experienced and construed has produced some ‘uncomfortable’ findings (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux 2005; Dixon et al. 2010). As the above discussion can attest, interactions viewed by authorities as legitimate and unproblematic can be viewed very differently by those on whose trust and cooperation they depend.
Conclusion

While it might be tempting to assert, based on legislation and codes of practice, that discrimination in the airport does not exist, there are strong grounds for Muslims’ claims about biased and humiliating treatment in airports. Moreover, there are grounds for arguing that these experiences are eroding trust and confidence in airport and wider authorities. Of concern, recent research suggests that once people lose confidence that they are respected by authorities and included in society, the restoration of trust may be difficult. In part, this is because of the asymmetrical effects of negative and positive experiences. For instance, Skogan’s (2012) research on public confidence in police found that the impact of negative experiences on perceptions of performance and legitimacy were four to fourteen times greater than the impact of positive experiences. Moreover, among socially marginalised groups there is evidence that the adoption of procedural justice measures in policing have no effect and sometimes may even create backlash effects (Cherney and Murphy 2011; Huo and Tyler 2001). There are a number of potential explanations for this. One is that where people belong to a group that is stigmatised or targeted, prior negative experiences can colour how they interpret future experiences (including positive ones: Lloyd and Foster 2009). In addition, where there is a history of conflict and mistrust it can be difficult to create the conditions where the interaction is seen as between two co-citizens rather than between groups (Giles, Choi and Dixon 2010).

From the perspective of airport authorities, national security concerns may trump concerns about Muslims’ confidence in their relations with airport authorities (Lum et al. 2013). However, research shows that withholding information and cooperation from authorities is more likely in contexts where wider community members feel alienated and less able to act (Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens 2006). There can be no doubt that addressing Muslims’ negative experiences in airports is difficult in a wider context in which Muslims have been positioned as dangerous ‘other’. There are, however, both immediate and long-term dangers to security and society if we do not try.

Notes

1 The term ‘examining officer’ has the same meaning as in paragraph 1 of Schedule 7 i.e. a constable; or an immigration officer or customs officer designated for the purpose of Schedule 7 by the Secretary of State (and, in the case of a customs officer, the Commissioners of Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs), such officer having been accredited as having successfully completed training in the use of the Schedule 7 powers. The code only applies to police officers and designated immigration or customs officers when they are exercising their functions as examining officers under the Act and not in any other circumstances, for example where they may be questioning a person under the Immigration Act 1971 or the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

2 To underscore the argument that bias not only exists but that it might in fact be making us less safe, Jeffrey Goldberg, an Israeli-American journalist, has engaged in various ‘dubious’ behaviours (e.g. ripping up counterfeit boarding passes) in US airports without arousing suspicion. He has also passed US airport check-points while carrying a range of ‘suspicious’ paraphernalia including Al Qaeda T-shirts, Islamic Jihadi flags, and Hezbollah videotapes, all without being prevented from flying (Goldberg 2008; Kleinder 2010). Goldberg’s conclusion: ‘Airport security in America is a sham — “security theatre” designed to make travellers feel better and catch stupid terrorists.’

References


