***Islamophobia and Securitization:
Religion, Ethnicity and the Female Voice***

By T. Saeed (2016)

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Reviewed by Victoria Canning

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Islamophobia is increasingly becoming an unchallenged and acceptable part of the British and Western social psyche. (p. 17)

In her first monograph, Tania Saeed has set a clear and consciously critical basis for understanding the everyday mechanisms of Islamophobia in its contemporary forms. As the above quotation attests, she is upfront in her concerns around a political landscape which is at once *facilitating* space for Islamophobic attitudes while simultaneously projecting the illusion of a society that *challenges* racist and Islamophobic violence.

Set across seven chapters, Saeed constructs a logical narrative that draws together legislative developments and sociological understandings of how Islamophobia and racism seep into everyday discourses. Focusing predominantly on Britain, and developing forty-five first-hand narratives from women students and alumni across twelve institutions in England, Saeed maps recent shifts and constrictions in various legislative Acts relating to terrorism (2000; 2001; 2005; 2006; 2016, to name but a few). While numerous commentators have recently drawn clear correlations between legislation, Islamophobia and political discourses around 'terror' (Massoumi, Mills and Miller 2017; Sabir 2017), Saeed addresses two key challenges: the infiltration of legislative controls into the otherwise supposedly liberal space of higher education institutions in the United Kingdom, and the gendered implications therein.

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Indeed, there are few opportunities to fully engage in the social dynamics faced by women students and alumni. *Islamophobia and Securitization* does this well, utilising women's own voices to draw out lived examples of racist and Islamophobic experiences, individual and collective resistance and strategic agency. Saeed creates space in an appendix to outline each of the participants' backgrounds. From a feminist perspective, this is an interesting and important inclusion, preferable to the otherwise faceless stories that participants in research can become. Politically, however, it also creates a stronger sense of the complexities in the women's identities, some negotiating their perceptions of 'Britishness' with Pakistani heritage, others deciding what aspects of their religion they accept or reject. Perhaps most interesting to students unfamiliar with Islam will be the challenge to perceptions of agency regarding the wearing of the veil. It is within these histories that complex relations become evident, from Hafsa who wears the hijab against the wishes of her parents, to Nadia who is the only member of her family to wear the hijab and jilbab – undercutting the dominant narrative that all women who wear Islamic veils are forced to do so.

Infiltrated learning

The key aspect of legislation related to the education sector that Saeed addresses is *Prevent*. The Prevent Duty became a legal duty in Britain through the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. It requires that people working or studying in school, further or higher education have 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015). Moreover, and perhaps more insidiously, *Prevent* requires that those working in education 'intervene' and argues against the: 'Vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015).

From a critical criminological perspective, this particular piece of legislation is among the most undemocratic developed in recent times. As Saeed argues, the toxic combination of the sociopolitical conflation of 'Muslim' with 'terrorist', not only in the media but in political discourse (see Burnett 2016) means that '[t]he student – in particular, the Muslim student – becomes a suspect the moment they enter the university; either they are already radical, or are vulnerable to radicalisation.' Considering that 56% of all students referred through *Prevent* in 2012–14 were Muslim

(National Police Chiefs Council 2015) – a staggering statistic if one considers that only 5% of the population are Muslim – Saeed has good reason for concern.

It is perhaps here, however, that *Islamophobia and Securitization* could go further in its conceptual analysis of various legislations and policies related to terrorism, *Prevent* included. As has been evidenced over the past two decades in Britain, and much longer in relation to the North of Ireland, various acts relating to terrorism facilitate other repressions of protest or dissent. Had Saeed drawn from relevant case studies in the North of Ireland, there would be further contextualisation of forms of social control and net-widening (Cohen 1985; see also Massoumi, Mills and Miller 2017) which facilitate a ‘suspect community’, and thus exacerbate localised community frictions (Hillyard 1993). Moreover, although disproportionately (in some spaces, almost exclusively) affecting Muslim populations in the United Kingdom, multiple acts have been used to repress dissenting voices, protesters and indeed defenders of civil liberties and rights. The Stanstead 15 is a most recent example – protesters prosecuted under terrorism charges for peacefully protesting against a charter deportation flight – while fracking has been a key target area for repressing challenges to the state under similar charges.

This brings me to the issue of the state more broadly, and its role in orchestrating an environment that is hostile towards those it constructs as ‘not British’. As Saeed points out, *Prevent* focuses on the importance of ‘British values’. Indeed, many of the participants in her research discuss how they navigate conflicting identities, particularly those sharing British and Pakistani heritage or national identities. However, as there is no consensus on what ‘British values’ might look like, it is vital that the *construction* of such values be scrutinised. Saeed does this in various discussions of social Othering, but – again, from a critical criminological perspective – could expand to consider how this Othering is physical as well as political, specifically in the construction of borders and indeed internal boundaries. In the final chapter, *Islamophobia and Securitization* addresses this as creating a ‘fortress of exclusion’ (p. 178). Xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia perforated practically all aspects of political discourse as the crisis in European responses to refugees escalated in 2015, and in the lead-up to the Brexit vote. As such, there is arguably more scope to interlink centre and far-right political dialogue and media representation with escalations in Islamophobic, racist and anti-Semitic violence prior to and directly after Britain voted to leave the European Union (see Burnett 2016).

Reconstructing gendered binaries

The issues raised above are also echoed in the broader social conscience where gendered dynamics are concerned. As Saeed argues, 'While the male is portrayed as a troublemaker, the British Pakistani Muslim female is viewed as a victim of patriarchal culture, either "forced" into marriage, or forced to carry the burden of community "honour" ' (p. 27). As with *Prevent*, this construction can be incredibly limiting for women who are repeatedly represented as having little or no autonomy or agency. As the research participants indicate, this is not always the case and indeed, as will be addressed in more detail below, state actions can be as repressive as or more repressive than religious fundamentalism – across Islam or otherwise.

That said, the text overall replicates a kind of gendered binary which overlooks wider complexities regarding sexuality or sexual orientation which are important to understanding women's voices, an aspect central to the text. Heteronormativity is alluded to but not discussed. Furthermore, there are points within the text where the author engages in comments either at face value, or without critical reflection. Two stand out in particular: the first is a statement from a member of alumni at a London university, Hafiza, who replicates a fairly problematic 'Madonna/Whore' binary, stating: 'Niqabi women are an asset to the community. We don't smoke, drink or gamble' (p. 70). There seems ample space for critical discussion of how gender is constructed within strong religious discourses (within and beyond Islam), as well as the implications of gendered divisions within communities when women do not adhere to fundamental principles of given religious expectations.

The second is a slightly different but similarly significant point: Saeed has a tendency to relay assertions from participants without drawing out evidence to either support or counteract such claims. For example, Faiza, an undergraduate at a West Yorkshire university, claimed that Pakistani and Bengali people are targeted with violence more than Saudi Arabian people, while Abida from another university in West Yorkshire made similar claims for people from the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon as notably more Westernised (p. 120). Such arguments might be useful for deconstructing the complex relationships within and between national identities, communities and religions. Considering that non-white Britons are otherwise often constructed as some kind of monolithic minority identity, these concerns and opinions offer nuanced ways of seeing and understanding social and personal constructions of 'difference'.

Conclusion

Islamophobia and Securitization sets a platform for students in the social sciences to understand the legislative and sociopolitical landscape of current attitudes towards Muslims in the United Kingdom, and indeed in Western Europe. Saeed has constructed an important text which facilitates insight into the everyday experiences of Muslim women in a way that rekindles the personal as political, and which provides insight into the complexity of racism, nationalism and Islamophobia in their oft-shifting forms. For students of critical race studies, interest will be garnered in Saeed's conceptualisation of Pakophobia (Chapter 5), while students of intersectional feminism will welcome the voices of women who are all too often obscured or excluded from dominant narratives of gendered inequalities and violence.

From an activist academic perspective, the strongest points develop towards the end of *Islamophobia and Securitization*, specifically in Chapters 6 and 7. It is here that Saeed's own arguments seem most fully developed and constructively forceful:

[t]he pervasive Islamophobic rhetoric that has inundated media and political accounts about Muslims and Islam in the West has eroded the fundamentals of a liberal and free society, presenting the greatest challenge that countries in the West, including Britain, have faced. (p. 177)

Herein lies the key juxtaposition evident in the policing and securitisation of Muslim bodies: that regressive, undemocratic laws and policies are expanding in the name of upholding democracy and liberal social values. The gendered implications of these are increasingly toxic. As I write, the Danish government is debating a ban on Islamic veils as incompatible with Danish values; eight years after France's 'Burqa ban', and almost two years since Angela Merkel endorsed the use of law to facilitate a partial ban. As Saeed notes, 'a woman wearing a niqab is instantly identified with an extremist religion, in need of being protected and saved' (p. 8); yet ironically it is the same women's bodies that have been the frontline of Islamophobic attacks, both physical and political.

Without any hint of irony, and as Saeed evidences throughout *Islamophobia and Securitization*, states implement the same mechanisms of control that they present themselves to be fighting against.

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