

Not Entitled to Talk: (Mis)recognition, Inequality and Social Activism of Young Muslims

Sociology

1–18

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DOI: 10.1177/0038038519867630

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Abstract

This article considers the relationship between (mis)recognition, inequality and social activism through the lens of young Muslims' response to their positioning as 'suspect communities'. It draws on qualitative empirical research to suggest that the institutionalisation of misrecognition, including through the preventative ('Prevent') arm of UK counter-terrorism strategy, may mobilise young Muslims to resist 'suspect' status and make claims to the right to equal esteem. This forms part of the motivation towards social activism that mitigates the harm inflicted by misrecognition. However, the particular historical and cultural form of the institutionalisation of misrecognition, which renders 'preventing Prevent' a priority for young Muslims, may compound their status subordination. Drawing on critiques of the politics of recognition, and contextualising findings in debates on racism, anti-Muslim attitudes and societal securitisation, the article concludes that fighting misrecognition with recognition politics mis-places the role of power in subject formation and constrains young Muslims' political agency.

Keywords

counter-terrorism policy, inequality, misrecognition, politics of recognition, suspect communities, young Muslims, youth activism

Introduction

Charles Taylor's (1994) seminal essay on 'The politics of recognition' highlighted the importance of the struggle for *recognition* of minority or subaltern groups through the

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'politics of multiculturalism'. Although Taylor excluded Muslim identity claims-making from legitimate recognition politics (Meer et al., 2012: 132), his argument that individuals or groups suffer real damage from encountering a persistently demeaning picture of themselves resonates strongly in the context of the largely negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the British media (Allen, 2012; INSTED, 2007: 18; Knott et al., 2013: 79–100; Moore et al., 2008; Poole, 2011; Richardson, 2001) and rising anti-Muslim attitudes among the population (Field, 2012). These are precisely the conditions for fostering *misrecognition*, which acts as 'a form of oppression' by confining subjectivities within distorted modes of being (Taylor, 1994: 25).

Much of the subsequent elaboration and critique of the notion of 'recognition' has been concerned with the adequacy of its understanding of subjectivity, agency, identity, equality and power at a philosophical level (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013; Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Genel and Deranty, 2017; McBride, 2013; McNay, 2008; Olson, 2008). This article contributes rather to an emergent literature on particular struggles for recognition in the specific contexts in which they take place to produce more nuanced accounts of the relationship between (mis)recognition, identity and political agency (Martineau, 2012: 173; Meer et al., 2012: 133). It draws on critical engagements with theories of (mis)recognition to demonstrate a particular institutionalisation of misrecognition (Fraser, 2008) through the enactment of the Prevent strand of the UK's counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST), which has worked to position Muslims as 'suspect communities' (Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011; Kapoor, 2018; Kundnani, 2014; McGhee, 2008). Drawing on a qualitative study of socially active young Muslims in the UK, however, it suggests that the securitisation of society – epitomised for research participants by the 'Prevent agenda' – creates an interpretive framework that identifies misrecognition at the group level and impels social activism (Honneth, 1995). Honneth's understanding of the relationship between misrecognition, social injustice and agency has been criticised for envisaging agency as 'the inevitable effect of withheld recognition' (McNay, 2008: 139). However, this mobilisation effect is reflected in research respondents' own understandings of misrecognition as a 'double-edged sword', suggesting, not least, the need to consider how the politics of recognition is reflexively engaged by a young generation of social actors. In contrast, Bourdieu's conceptualisation of misrecognition as the process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but as simply the 'order of things' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 168), sits uneasily alongside the awareness by research participants of the symbolic violence being perpetrated through securitisation.

It is Bourdieu's notion of habitus – as the process through which power relations are incorporated into the body and form a 'socialized subjectivity' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 126) – however, that reveals the limits of the politics of (mis)recognition. His understanding of power as co-extensive with the process of subject formation (rather than secondary to it) (McNay, 2008: 11) suggests that although our research participants are aware of the power that subjects them, their response is constrained by envisaging that power as enacted upon already constituted Muslim subjectivities and open to contestation through agency driven by pre-constituted identities. Drawing on critiques of theories of the politics of recognition and misrecognition by Fraser, McNay and Athanasiou, and informed by Bourdieu's formulation of the relationship between power, embodied

subjectivity and agency, we thus argue that, in this particular context, misrecognition can act as a mobilising platform to seek redress of social injustice. However, fighting misrecognition with an identity politics reliant on resources loaded with politics of misrecognition may re-inscribe the injured identity (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 86) and constrain the potential for tackling questions of social injustice.

(Mis)recognition, Inequality and Social Activism

That the desire for recognition is ‘a permanent and universal trait of human nature’ (Park and Burgess, 1921: 439) was established in the writings of the Chicago School in the 1920s. However, it is only in the work of Taylor and Honneth that the demand for ‘recognition’ becomes identified as a key driver of politics.

For Taylor (1994: 64–66), recognition forges identity (since the ‘self’ is formed in response to how we are recognised by ‘others’) and thus misrecognition inflicts the same degree of harm as inequality, exploitation and injustice. Moreover, the diversity of the contemporary world means equality can no longer be achieved through ‘universal respect’; whereas traditional egalitarian politics promotes ‘blindness’ to difference, recognition politics calls for equal respect for what makes us different (McBride, 2013: 10–16; Taylor, 1994: 43).

For Honneth also, recognition constitutes the fundamental struggle of our age. The moral experiences of what he calls ‘disrespect’ – not ‘interests’ rooted in material inequalities – are the terrain of social conflicts (Honneth, 1995: 161). Most importantly, for this article, Honneth brings to the debate a three-fold explication of the relationship between the need for recognition and social activism. First, he understands the autonomous subject as developed through achieving recognition; expressed in the forms of love, respect and esteem (McBride, 2013: 139). When recognition is denied, the negative experience of social disrespect generates the ‘opportunity for moral insight’ and the impulse for social activism (Honneth, 1995: 163, 2007: 71; McBride, 2013: 3). Second, social action allows individuals to experience a sense of their own ‘moral or social worth’ (Honneth, 1995: 164) and dispel the negative emotions resulting from misrecognition (Honneth, 1995: 138). Third, collective resistance can emerge only if subjects are able to articulate feelings of disrespect ‘within an intersubjective framework of interpretation that they can show to be typical for an entire group’, for it is this that allows the social causes of disrespect to be laid bare (Honneth, 1995: 163–164).

The connection between the experience of ‘disrespect’ and the expression of social and political agency is important for understanding how young people in this study interpret their struggle against misrecognition. However, Honneth’s reduction of social conflict to variants of a struggle for recognition has been subject to sustained critique, most notably from Nancy Fraser. Fraser rejects Honneth’s contentions that political agency is inherent in ‘pre-political suffering’ and that social discontent stems from the moral expectation that one’s personal identity be adequately recognised (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 202–203). By treating misrecognition as a free-standing cultural harm, she argues, identity politics abstracts the injustice from its institutional matrix and obscures its entwinement with economic inequality (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 83). Fraser’s critique of the politics of recognition is crucial for interpreting the research findings presented in

this article because it demonstrates: the significance of the institutionalisation of misrecognition; and the entwinement of misrecognition and socio-economic inequality.

Fraser understands misrecognition not as psychological injury but a form of institutionalised status subordination (McNay, 2008: 127). She argues that the institutionalisation of misrecognition in laws, government policies, administrative regulations and professional practices works to constitute some categories of persons as less than full members of society (Fraser, 2008: 84). Misrecognition, Fraser (2008: 86) argues, is not purveyed primarily through prejudice (derogatory attitudes and beliefs) but through institutions and practices that regulate social interaction according to norms that impede parity. Among others, she cites marriage laws that exclude same-sex partnerships and policing practices that associate racialised persons with criminality as examples. For Fraser (2008: 84, emphasis in original), misrecognition should be understood not as the depreciation of group identity but as '*social subordination* in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life as a result of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as relatively unworthy of respect or esteem'. Fraser (2008: 84) concedes that a politics of recognition is required to redress injustice but this is not an *identity politics* but a politics to overcome subordination by 'deinstitutionalizing patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation'. Moreover, this recognition politics must be accompanied by a politics of redistribution since some actors lack the necessary resources to interact with others as peers (2008: 85). Fraser's distinction between recognition and redistribution is highly pertinent to the understanding of the experience of research participants in this study for whom misrecognition is profoundly intertwined with socio-economic inequality.

In making sense of our empirical findings, therefore, we draw on Honneth's insight into how the experience of 'disrespect' can become the emotional basis for social and political agency. However, we are guided by Fraser's warning against reifying oppression as injury to the self's eternal need for affirmation while obscuring from view economic inequalities (McNay, 2008: 147). In presenting findings from our study, we seek to contribute to understanding the relationship between (mis)recognition, politics and agency by considering a concrete case of misrecognition and one form of agency emerging from it. Before turning to that study, however, we set out the case for adding to Fraser's examples of the institutionalisation of misrecognition, counter-terrorism policies and practices that construct 'suspect communities' on the basis of racial, ethnic or faith identities.

'Suspectification': Embodying and Materialising Misrecognition

A 'suspect community' is a group of people (identified by an ethnic, religious, racial, national or other marker) who are 'constructed as "suspects" by mechanisms deployed by the state to ensure national or state "security" and reinforced by societal responses and social practices' (Breen-Smyth, 2014: 231–232). That Muslim communities have been the primary target of counter-terrorism legislation initiated and implemented in the wake of the 'war on terror' has been documented in a number of studies (Choudhury and

Fenwick, 2011; Kapoor, 2018; Kundnani, 2014; McGhee, 2008). Kundnani (2014: 9–10) argues that theories of radicalisation – which claim to describe the process by which ‘young Muslims become terrorists’ – have become the lens through which western societies view Muslim populations. Importantly for young people’s particular experience of being constructed as ‘suspect’, from 2015 the Prevent duty (section 26 of the UK Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015) has required that a range of social institutions (including schools, colleges and further and higher education institutions) give ‘due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’ (HM Government, 2015: 2). This has led to criticism of Prevent as prioritising ‘securitized surveillance’ while failing to provide any meaningful educational component to counter extremism (Thomas, 2016: 184).

While Prevent is a discrete element of the wider CONTEST strategy, it is indicative of what critics see as ‘the sprawling official “counter-terrorism” apparatus’ that renders the state central ‘to the production of contemporary Islamophobia’ (Massoumi et al., 2017: 8). From this perspective the state is not one of a number of sites of the *discursive* production of Muslims as ‘other’ but Islamophobia is a form of structural racism generated by government policies and ‘institutionalised in state structures as profiling, violations of civil rights and mass violence’ (Kundnani, 2017: 37). Recent critical engagements with the notion of ‘suspect community’, however, shift attention from the state to highlight the differential impact of counter-terrorism practices due to the heterogeneity of Muslim communities and how these policies draw on the pro-active involvement of Muslims in their own policing (Ragazzi, 2016: 729). Abbas (2019a) documents how internal surveillance of young people’s religious identities is undertaken within Muslim families as a response to fear that young people will be targeted by state counter-terrorism police or themselves be radicalised or radicalise others. Central to Abbas’s (2019b: 264–265) work is the understanding of ‘suspect communities’ as neither ‘imagined’ nor undifferentiated. Employing the notion of the ‘internal suspect body’, she elucidates the ‘diverse ways that suspectification operates’ to shape racialised identities in embodied and affective ways (2019b: 266). This provides a framework through which to understand the everyday, material experience of misrecognition.

Relations of subordination are not derived from culturally rooted hierarchies of status (recognition) alone but produced through their interaction with other dimensions of the social and economic order (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 212–214). Muslims experience the greatest economic disadvantages of any group in UK society (Stevenson et al., 2017: 5). Within the economically active population, 24 per cent of Muslims are classified as ‘Never worked/long-term unemployed’ compared to just 6 per cent of the overall population and 46 per cent of the Muslim population live in 10 per cent of the most deprived local authority districts (Stevenson et al., 2017: 6). These complex disadvantages are reflected in a disproportionately high rate of poverty among the British Muslim community alongside the lowest rates of civic participation of all religious groups (Garratt, 2016: 2–3). However, despite this social inequality, young Muslims are engaged in a wide range of activism in pursuit of social justice, challenging discrimination and protesting against oppressive state policies (Abbas and Hamid, 2019: 293). It is to the relationship between social activism, misrecognition and inequality that we now turn.

Data Collection and Analysis

The research presented here was one of 22 ethnographic case studies conducted across 10 countries as part of the H2020 PROMISE (Promoting Youth Involvement and Social Engagement: Opportunities and Challenges for Conflicted Young People across Europe) project.¹ The project explored the social involvement of young people identified as facing conflict or being stigmatised or marginalised through negative representations. Criteria for case selection were: the presence of young people (14–29 years) identified as in conflict (with authorities, older generations or social norms) or stigmatised or marginalised through negative associations; *and* the presence of a response to that conflict or stigmatisation. All case studies were conducted and analysed, first, holistically and discretely. However, to facilitate subsequent cross-case analysis, a common set of research questions and a skeleton interview schedule and coding tree were used in all cases (Pilkington, 2018). The selection of this case study of young British Muslims was informed by our awareness of the existing literature on ‘suspect communities’ as well as of campaigns and actions – NUS ‘Students Not Suspects’ and ‘Preventing Prevent’ campaigns – which challenged that status.

The field research was conducted by the two authors (November 2016 to September 2017) using a combination of interview and participant observation techniques. Individual respondents were approached through associations in which young Muslims were involved, such as student-run Islamic Societies of further and higher educational institutions (ISOCs), the Students’ Union and National Union of Students (NUS), local and national youth justice and/or advocacy organisations and community networks. A key concern for us was that participating in the research would not further stigmatise the young people. For our participants it was important also that they participated not as representatives of a ‘problem’ group or as ‘victims’ of anti-Muslim racism but as active agents. This mutual understanding of the research as focusing on how young people *respond to* stigmatising and marginalising discourses has guided not only the field research but also our analysis and publications.

The authors are both female, university employed researchers but brought different ethnic and religious backgrounds to the field. Pilkington is white British and of no religion while Acik has an ethnic minority background from the Middle East. On a practical level this meant that much of the ‘access’ and participant observation was conducted by Acik although we both recruited participants through our own networks and relevant events and both conducted interviews. While the respective positionalities of the researchers as ‘outsider’ (Pilkington) and ‘insider’ (Acik) appear self-evident, in fact Acik found herself positioned as *both* insider (as member of an ethnic minority group from the Middle East) and outsider (as she belonged to a religious minority group often treated as ‘not Muslim’ in Muslim majority countries). This positionality sometimes facilitated the conversation but, on occasion, proved uncomfortable for either the research participant or the researcher. The diversity of communities from which our respondents came also led to practical dilemmas, uncertainties and unintended rule-breaking relating to dress code and behaviour in the course of field research. The ambiguity of positionality and how it can change in different contexts and over the course of the research is discussed further elsewhere (see Acik and Pilkington, 2018).

The study included 26 interviews with 27 respondents; interviews were conducted by the two authors with the exception of four interviews undertaken by peer researchers (see Acik and Pilkington, 2018). Eight events were observed and/or participated in including: ISOC and Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) events; community events discussing Islamophobia and counter-extremism; a mosque youth group session; and two city centre demonstrations. Initially, events to observe were selected because they were spaces of engagement for young Muslims. Later, respondents themselves invited us to participate in events they were attending.

Participants in the research were allocated (or chose) pseudonyms before the recorded interviews were transcribed. We recorded notes from observed events in field diaries which were anonymised before being coded alongside the interviews and given equal weight in the analysis. Following anonymisation, interviews, field diaries and a number of images were uploaded into a discrete Nvivo 'project'. Each 'source' was then coded using inductive coding but, at the axial level, employing a skeleton coding tree agreed for all cases across the larger project.

Background socio-demographic data collected show respondents were drawn from across the target age range (from 14 to 32 years of age), with the majority (78%) being between 17 and 22. There was a slight overrepresentation of males (55.5%). The majority of respondents (63%) declared their ethnicity to be Asian British, 4 per cent were white British and the remaining respondents were from other black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents were born in the UK. The vast majority (89%) of participants were Muslim, of whom one described herself as a white British Muslim 'revert'. Two respondents said they had 'no religion' although both were from Muslim backgrounds.

'Not Suspects': From 'Disrespect' to Political Agency

Outlining the findings of the research, we start by documenting young Muslims' experience of 'disrespect' (Honnet, 2007). We then consider whether, and how, counter-terrorism policies provide an interpretive framework for respondents, which identifies such 'disrespect' as a collective experience rooted in the institutional misrecognition of Muslim communities as 'suspect'. We proceed to explore how this misrecognition contributes to respondents' social activism not least through engagement in 'preventing Prevent' campaigns. Finally, we consider the continued experience among respondents of a lack of parity in participation – expressed as feeling 'not entitled to talk' – and conclude that this demonstrates the limits to the politics of recognition in tackling injustice.

Experiences of 'Disrespect' and Misrecognition

While participants in this study had experienced many forms of abuse – including racist and Islamophobic verbal and physical abuse (Acik and Pilkington, 2018: 172–174) – the focus of this article is on those experiences that participants interpreted through the prism of misrecognition resulting from 'suspectification' (Abbas, 2019b). Ruksana described one such experience shortly after the July 2005 London bombings:

I'd gone to PC World to buy a new printer, and walking back home [. . .] with the printer in my hand and [I remember] having a white van pull up next to me, and two men get out and demand that I open the box to prove that it wasn't a bomb.

Exposure to such hyper-surveillance occurs not only at particular times but in particular spaces. Airports, where profiling techniques single out people of Middle Eastern, Arabic, South Asian and/or of Muslim faith as suspect communities (Patel, 2012), are a notorious site of misrecognition (Blackwood, 2015: 261). Abdullah recounted such an experience of being stopped and interrogated by airport security when travelling back from his honeymoon because, he supposes, he was wearing 'Islamic clothing' and carrying a backpack. He describes the experience as 'intimidating' as it made him feel 'like the police thought I was a suspect, potentially carrying something dangerous inside of that bag'. In addition to individual psychological consequences – diminished self-worth, depression and powerlessness – hyper-surveillance can induce behavioural and interactional strategies to manage anticipated misrecognition including identity performances that render individuals less visibly Muslim (Blackwood et al., 2015: 151–161). Such practices may be sustained and shape embodied subjectivities. Khaled remembers that, growing up, he avoided speaking Arabic in public as it was seen 'as a very negative thing' while Liyla recounts how she had felt 'I don't want to be a Muslim' because she associated it with an inescapable, racialised oppression. Both Khaled and Liyla interpreted these experiences through the lens of misrecognition and as rectifiable. For Liyla, this was possible by nurturing 'respect for your culture' while for Khaled it required societal recognition of the 'need to respect' diversity.

Achieving proper recognition, for some research participants, requires engaging in dialogue to counter false assumptions. For Ashraf, the associations made between Islamic teaching, the perceived curtailment of women's rights and press coverage of 'Muslim grooming gangs', meant 'I feel like, at times, I do need to explain myself, my religion, and explain that this isn't part of that.' Others consciously engaged in benevolent activities to *re-present* Muslims in a positive light. Ameena, who felt surrounded by 'so much negativity', responds by consciously utilising her skills 'to help as many people as possible' in order to counter negative associations of Muslim women. Indeed, for some respondents, far from retreating from view, misrecognition convinced them of the importance of making the Muslim body visible. Following her experience of being implicitly accused of being a terrorist, Ruksana concluded that it is more important than ever to wear the hijab publicly. This signals resistance to the way in which visual markers have become interpreted through political categories of moderate/extremist rather than religious frameworks that was found among young Muslims by Abbas (2019a: 1466) also. Zuhair generalises this experience, suggesting that stigmatisation and Islamophobia have been contributing factors in reclaiming Muslim identity:

as a result of the war on terror, as a result of growing Islamophobia and institutional Islamophobia and the persecution of Muslims and anti-Muslim rhetoric in the UK, many young Muslims immediately, like, came to the defences of Islam and immediately sort of became one of those front voices in the fight back against anti-Muslim rhetoric.

Seeking recognition of Muslim identity as a response to experiences of misrecognition was found also among young Danish Muslims (Lindekilde, 2012: 121). In that study the misrecognition encountered emanated from a specific governmental counter-radicalisation strategy that young Muslims perceived as stigmatising (Lindekilde, 2012: 124). It is to the role of such legislation in framing the social causes of misrecognition and creating the basis for social action that attention is now turned.

‘Suspect Communities’: The Institutionalisation of Misrecognition

Disrespect becomes the grounds for collective resistance only if individuals can articulate their experiences within shared interpretive frameworks characteristic for the group (Honneth, 1995: 163). Such a framework was identified in this study as the securitisation of politics and society experienced as constructing Muslim communities as ‘suspect’. While counter-terrorism legislation must be seen within its wider societal context, our respondents single out the statutory obligations attached to the Prevent duty as central to the institutionalisation of misrecognition. This is because it requires educational (among other) institutions to include in their ‘safeguarding’ duty an awareness of any student showing signs of vulnerability to extremism including non-violent extremism² and, where necessary, report individuals for possible referral to the (voluntary) Channel programme providing early intervention to prevent radicalisation. Compliance with the Prevent legislation involves staff training, risk assessment policies, IT monitoring and, in schools, the promotion of ‘British values’. Consequently, most participants in our study had had direct engagement with Prevent provisions at some point in their educational careers.

Respondents described how the ‘Prevent agenda’ pervaded classroom experience. A sarcastic remark by a teacher that Maria’s approval for the death penalty was ‘very extremist’ led her to fear being reported as having extremist views. Samira described a heated debate with a teacher following a terrorist attack in Paris when students expressed their frustration that victims of terror attacks in the Middle East did not get the same attention as those in Europe. As a result, Samira said, the school had instituted a policy to avoid discussing controversial issues that might lead to British foreign policy being questioned or injustices experienced by Muslims being raised. Research conducted among schools on the effects of Prevent has found evidence confirming Samira’s experience that making the Prevent duty statutory leads to the shutting down of debate (Acik et al., 2018: 484) but also cases where it has meant more resources being dedicated to discussing controversial topics (Busher et al., 2017).

Universities are also required to prevent radicalisation by denying space for radicalism and reducing exposure to radicals and radical ideas (Brown and Saeed, 2015: 1954). University students among our respondents were concerned that the statutory Prevent duty meant that ‘everyone turns into the police’, leading to university staff, with minimal training, interpreting a terrorist threat as ‘any brown guy who’s reading about, you know extremism or Islam’ (Ahmed). For most university students in this study, however, personal encounters of Prevent related to organising events on campus. Shareef, an ISOC

organiser, complained about the stringent risk assessment procedures, including the vetting of external speakers, when inviting an outside speaker to an event on campus. Such measures can mean having security personnel at events, keeping an attendance list, audio recording the lecture and event, monitoring any imposition of gender segregation and, if a speaker is identified as ‘extremist’ or controversial, either cancelling the event or bringing in another speaker to present an alternative viewpoint. While the policy applies to all student societies, Muslim students described their events as being subject to more rigorous risk assessment procedures. Fiza, for example, complained that three security guards had been posted to an event she had organised despite her assessment that they were not needed. However, there is significant variation in how universities and Students’ Unions (SU) comply with these policies leading Shareef to compare his situation favourably with that at other universities where ‘their prayer halls have been installed with, like, cameras [. . .] they’re recorded 24 hours a day’.

Respondents, albeit less frequently, described the impact of institutionalisation of misrecognition via Prevent in their communities and mosques, which, although having no statutory duty under Prevent, were perceived as being under pressure to report signs of extremism.

The point here is not to simply criticise the Prevent policy but to recognise and explore its social consequences. Misrecognition generates meta-perceptions among minority communities about how majority group members perceive them (Blackwood et al., 2015: 151) and acts at both an individual and social level to ‘cultivate patterns of mistrust and alienation, in which identities are likely to become more narrowly defined, and in which cultural groups are likely to become more insular’ (Martineau, 2012: 164). A particularly bleak scenario is identified in Lindekilde’s (2012: 120–124) study of the unintended impact (‘iatrogenic effects’) of the Danish government’s counter-radicalisation Action Plan of 2009, whose perception by young Muslims as degrading, discriminatory and stigmatising led, *inter alia*, to responsive identity strategies in opposition to the majority society that misrecognised them. It is to the response to such institutionalisation of misrecognition among respondents in this study that we now turn.

‘It Gets Them to Mobilise’: Misrecognition and Political Agency

Alongside structural inequality (Garratt, 2016), misrecognition curtails civic engagement and leads to ‘Muslims’ loss of agency’ (Blackwood, 2015: 260). The young people who participated in our study – partially due to the selection criteria noted earlier – were engaged in a wide range of activities including charity work, volunteering, the propagation of Islam (*Dawa*), campaigns, protests and numerous social, cultural and educational activities. While consideration of the range of drivers and inhibitors of social activism is beyond the scope of this article (see Acik and Pilkington, 2018: 185–201), it is our contention that misrecognition provides part of the impetus to social activism. This is because, in the narratives of research participants, activities related to Prevent were those most frequently mentioned and the ‘Prevent agenda’ emerges as the interpretive framework through which they understood misrecognition as a collective experience.

This is expressed most clearly in Meena's understanding of Prevent as having contributed to Muslims being targeted as a security threat but, on the other hand, as:

a double-edged sword, in the fact that yes, it's been able to mobilise hundreds of student activists across the country and to make sure that, you know, their universities have an anti-Prevent policy and that they're standing up to Islamophobia, institutional Islamophobia.

The mobilisation referred to consists of actions as part of the 'Students Not Suspects' campaign (NUS Connect, 2017), which became official National Union of Students policy in 2015. This was a student-led campaign consisting of a series of national tours to raise awareness about Prevent and to call for its repeal. It received widespread media coverage and mobilised support across the country from academics, student societies and Students' Unions although the campaign was accused itself of having become 'a vehicle for extremist interests' (Black, 2018: 1). Meena had experienced this controversy first hand, having been involved in the organisation of an event for 'Students Not Suspects' at which Moazzam Begg of CAGE (a controversial advocacy organisation highly critical of UK anti-terrorism legislation) was a speaker.

The 'Students Not Suspects' campaign was heavily focused on higher and further education campuses leaving students at school or sixth-form college without any immediate vehicle to express their resistance to 'suspect' status. However, as Samira explains, for her the idea of 'preventing Prevent' emerged spontaneously out of discussion with like-minded people she had met at a summer camp on activism and radical politics:

So I was very vocal about like, 'I fucking hate Prevent' [. . .] 'I hate it, like it's, it's despicable.' [. . .] So we had like two ideas come out on the last day. [. . .] And it was like, youth homelessness and prevent Prevent, which were very different things. And they were like, 'What do you wanna call the second one?' And then it was like, 'Well, we're preventing Prevent so let's go with "Prevent Prevent".'

The strength of Samira's feelings is indicative of how counter-terrorism legislation, and especially the 2015 revised Prevent duty guidance, has come to stand for a much wider set of issues, often referred to as the 'Prevent agenda'. This is captured in the NUS Black Students' Preventing Prevent Handbook (2017: 5), which states that the Prevent policy 'emerged in, fed off, and in turn nourished an expansion in anti-Muslim racism to strengthen the state's hand and amass more powers of repression'. Thus, Ruksana refers consciously to the 'Prevent agenda' as being the object of resistance: 'I know, for example, like the Prevent agenda, has really politicised a lot of young people because they wanna campaign against that.' For Ashraf too, while acknowledging that the initial intention of Prevent had been 'to stop radicalisation', the policy was no longer about countering extremism but was 'victimising a large group of people, and stigmatising any actions that they do in order to catch a few rotten apples'.

However, some respondents found space for political agency from within the misrecognition to which Prevent has contributed (see also Dobbernack et al., 2015: 204). Fiza (who supported the 'Students Not Suspects' campaign) discovered that negotiations with the authorities who implement Prevent can be effective in mitigating its negative

effects. Ruksana also acknowledged that, despite its often negative association in Muslim communities, Prevent was an important aspect of safeguarding and recounted her own positive experience in working with local authorities, schools and Prevent panels to make sure that they identified correctly individuals at risk of being radicalised.

Thus, Prevent, and the wider discourse of war on terror, is a key site of the misrecognition experienced by young Muslims but also the terrain on which acts of ‘disrespect’ directed at individuals are identified as group experiences with distinct social causes. This, as respondents themselves note, has acted as a basis for social activism and resistance.

Not Entitled to Talk: The Limits and Constraints of Recognition Politics

It has been argued above that feeling misrecognised as ‘suspect communities’ reformulates individual experience of disrespect as the basis for social activism and creates ‘bonds of understanding’ (Breen-Smyth, 2014: 232) between those rendered ‘suspect’ that mobilise resistance. In this final section, these findings are complicated by questioning the straight line between identity and agency this might imply (McNay, 2008: 15) and exploring the limits of identity politics in challenging the misrecognition experienced by young Muslims. Drawing on the critique of recognition politics by Fraser (2008: 84–85), we argue, these constraints arise from the institutionalisation of misrecognition in patterns of cultural value and socio-economic inequalities, which work in tandem to prevent participatory parity.

Misrecognition, Fraser (2008: 84) argues, is not a matter of ‘depreciation of group identity’ but a form of social subordination; it is the product of ‘institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as relatively unworthy of respect or esteem’ and that work to deny the opportunity to participate equally in social life (2008: 84). In our study, this was evident in the feeling among respondents of being unentitled to talk:

with the whole media thing about Muslims, it makes you hold your tongue a lot more. Like you want to talk about an issue that doesn’t really affect Muslims or doesn’t really have anything to do with Muslims, but you know the fact that you’re a, like a Muslim immigrant that you’re not allowed to say certain things. Like for example, with the monarchy. [. . .] if you’re not a white British, and you say something anti-monarch, about the monarchy [. . .] suddenly you get all these comments about, ‘Oh, go back to your own country.’ (Ashraf)

Ashraf goes on to note that this lack of entitlement is still more acute when talking about British foreign policy, Islam or *jihad*; ‘as a Muslim’, he says, ‘if you try and put the blame on the Iraq invasion, you’re suddenly apologising for what ISIS are doing’ (Ashraf). For Nadira, who worked in a publicly visible role in a Muslim community centre, this meant that sometimes she was ‘too scared to say anything’. This was at least in part driven by her concern to protect her own organisation, echoing Abbas’s (2019b: 269) findings on how a culture of fear arising from being suspect is reproduced through feeling ‘you can’t do this or talk about this’. It follows that having a ‘radical’ political

view – an attribute often celebrated among student activists – becomes something to which young Muslims are unentitled. Meena says that only some people ‘are allowed to have radical ideas’. While her non-Muslim friend ‘can get away with saying whatever she says’, she continues, ‘you have to keep it to yourself, if you’re Muslim’ (Meena). Samira, who is still at college, has not yet given up on the right to express radical ideas and talks passionately about wanting to ‘reclaim the word radical’ as a positive term (see also Brown and Saeed, 2015: 1957). However, assigning the label ‘radical’ to Muslims active in public discourse remains a powerful tool for excommunicating them from public debate (Lindekilde, 2012: 122) and two respondents in our study believed that such misrecognition was consciously designed to deter Muslim students from becoming politically engaged. In this way, as Fraser (cited in McNay, 2008: 148) argues, misrecognition results in more than psychological injury – it produces ‘discriminatory effects on the equal standing of social actors’.

These experiences raise two important questions. The first concerns who has the right to bestow entitlement – be it to speak, to have radical views or to take up political positions? Fraser (2008: 84–85) argues that participatory parity is prevented through institutionalised patterns of cultural value working in tandem with maldistribution of resources. For participants in this research, this was a lived experience; although educationally high achievers, they talked about home lives that were materially constrained (‘working class’, ‘poor’ or ‘deprived’). Two respondents, who were acutely aware of the intersection of youth, class, ethnic and religious identity in terms of disadvantage, were active in a local organisation providing a dedicated space for working class young people’s social and political involvement. Thus, while participants in this study struggled for recognition, and against misrecognition, as young Muslims, they were aware that the politics of identity was not simple and that the injustice arising from it could not be addressed in abstraction from ‘its institutional matrix’ (Fraser, 2008: 83).

The second question raised relates to whether this injustice can be effectively redressed through a politics of recognition? Fraser’s (2008: 83) scepticism on this point is encapsulated in her suggestion that, identity politics ‘essentializes identity’, denying the complexity of lives and the multiplicity of identifications. As a consequence, McBride (2013: 35–36) argues, the politics of recognition fails to appreciate that ‘particular recognition’ may be ‘as abstract and oppressive as some forms of universalism since it assumes some expectations of what being such implies’. This is illustrated in Fiza’s horror at being congratulated by her white British neighbour on doing well ‘for somebody from her [Muslim] community’. Reflecting on the memory, Fiza says, ‘I just think, “What women in my community is she talking about?” She lives down the road from me. She is my community.’ This is a clear illustration of how power infuses the process of subject formation through habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 126), simultaneously racialising, excluding and denying agency. Fiza’s hurt at this exclusion, moreover, speaks to Fraser’s (2008: 85) warning that redressing injustice ‘requires affirming group differences only in cases where the obstacle to parity is underacknowledgement of distinctiveness’. Where *over-recognition* of difference is at the heart of misrecognition, the path into identity politics potentially constrains and limits the capacity to achieve social justice or even fuels the cycle of misrecognition (2008: 85).

Conclusion

Theories of recognition are frequently discussed with reference to a range of social movements in the post-1968 period but often in abstraction from empirical data regarding the relationship between (mis)recognition and social activism. In this article, the findings from research with young Muslims in the UK are drawn on to support Taylor's (1994: 25) claim that being confronted routinely with negative representations and associations gives rise to a 'misrecognition' that is oppressive. However, in contrast to other studies of responses to misrecognition by Muslim communities in Britain – which conclude misrecognition curtails civic engagement and leads to 'loss of agency' (Blackwood, 2015: 260) – the response of participants in our research suggests misrecognition can also provide an impulse for social activism. The shared interpretive framework that provides the 'semantic bridge' (Honneth, 1995: 163) between personal experiences of 'disrespect' and the impersonal aspirations of social activism in this case, we argue, is the construction of Muslim communities as 'suspect' through the incursion of counter-terrorism policies and practice into everyday life. Crucial to this process is the institutionalisation of misrecognition through, as Fraser (cited in McNay, 2008: 148) puts it, cultural value patterns that have discriminatory effects on the equal standing of social actors. It is through this institutionalisation that the politics of recognition becomes entwined with the politics of inequality.

The theoretical question of redistribution *or* recognition (Fraser and Honneth, 2003), however, is a redundant one; as Fraser (2008: 82) subsequently acknowledges, redressing injustice requires both a politics of recognition *and* a politics of redistribution. The pertinent question today is one that is illuminated through empirical examination of particular historical and cultural forms of the institutionalisation of misrecognition; it is this that shapes the terrain on which the struggle is fought. Indeed, as the reflections of research respondents in our study show, patterns of recognition and misrecognition themselves play a role in deciding the form that differences and identities assume (Martineau, 2012: 164). The question of power is central; if the politics of recognition does not question the conditions of recognition or unsettle state apparatuses as the natural mechanisms of recognition, then recognition does not secure the subject's autonomy but only survival within the 'matrices of self-definition provided by regulatory power' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 78, 83). In the specific case discussed here, the very institutionalisation of misrecognition through counter-terrorism measures that construct Muslim communities as 'suspect' acts to impose or channel identities in a way that shapes respondents' agency. This was seen in our research in the constraints on agents' entitlement to talk and act in the political realm – where they might challenge misrecognition – and in the circumscribing of the challenge to inequality and injustice not least through the suppression of the intersectionality of identities. This is not to dismiss identity politics but to acknowledge that while some types of identity are chosen, others are imposed (McNay, 2008: 164; Meer, 2012: 190) and that the struggle for identity recognition may valorise asserted identities while leaving unchallenged those who claim authority to dispense recognition and affirm the very power dynamics that generate misrecognition (McBride, 2013: 7; Martineau, 2012: 171–172).

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the young people who shared their thoughts, concerns, hopes and actions with us, and, in some cases, took on the role of researchers themselves – they are the subjects of this research. We are grateful also to the community organisers, mosque and student society representatives and individual activists whose understanding and assistance was invaluable. We would like to thank also Jo Deakin, coordinator of the H2020 PROMISE project, without whom we would not have had the opportunity to conduct the research behind this article, as well as our many research collaborators on the project from whom we have learned so much. Thanks, finally, to Ajmal Hussain and Bethan Harries for the generous sharing of their knowledge and experience at a crucial stage of developing this article and to the anonymous peer reviewers for their thoughtful and helpful comments.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 693221. This publication reflects only the views of the authors; the European Commission and Research Executive Agency are not responsible for any information it contains.

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Notes

1. See <http://www.promise.manchester.ac.uk/en/ethnographic-case-studies/>.
2. 'Extremism' is defined as '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' (HM Government, 2015: 2).

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Date submitted: October 2018

Date accepted: July 2019