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7. Pakistanis as Muslims in UK higher education (0074)

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The past year has seen further alarms and excursions in the UK about the connections and involvements of certain groups of Pakistanis-domiciled postgraduate students, alongside the launch of PMI2 to build higher education partnerships with selected countries, including Pakistan. This paper will draw on a small study of Pakistani residents who had studied for doctoral and masters degrees in the UK in the period immediately prior to and post 9/11 and 7/7. It will discuss their views on the relevance of the curriculum content and pedagogy of the courses they attended; their social interactions with British and other international students; and the substantial differences in the experiences of men and women. It will focus particularly on if, when and how they were positioned as 'Muslims' and any resultant changes in their identities and feelings towards the West, in the context of changing British HE and other policies.

7. Pakistanis as Muslims in UK higher education

Paper

The paper will explore some of the contradictions between UK government policy aimed at increasing the numbers of international students coming to study in Britain, and its counter concerns around immigration and combating terrorism. It will set these against the changing experiences of postgraduate students from Muslim countries, both when they are in the UK and after their return home, using the critical case of Pakistan.

The history of the increasing distance between earlier concerns to encourage, particularly Commonwealth, students to study here as part of post colonial ties and support (Williams 1981; Williams 1987) and later, more commercial views of international students, especially those who pay 'overseas' fees, is well known. More recently there has been work on how different HEIs are developing their international links and postgraduate recruitment (Middlehurst and Woodfield 2007), together with an increasing recognition of the importance of international students at doctoral level in shortage subject areas such as physics and economics (Kemp, Archer et al. 2009).

We therefore now find most UK universities have specialist International Offices focusing on increasing recruitment, support for international students, and consultancy. There have in addition been two Prime Minister's Initiatives for International Education, bringing in bigger guns to market an overall UK brand and build higher education partnerships with selected countries. The first was launched by Tony Blair in 1999 to achieve an overall increase of 50,000 students in HE and 25,000 in FE by 2005; and a second, PMI 2, started in 2006 to run for five years. Both included Pakistan, which by 2006 was one of the UK's most strategically important allies.

PMI 2 has broad and positive motives:

International education ... is not merely an export industry. It helps us to build friendships with people from around the world, enabling us to understand more about each others' cultures and opening the doors to greater trade, investment and political influence. By internationalising its education provision, the UK is able to attract intellectual capital – enriching the UK's capacity for research, technological growth and innovation (PMI 2 website).

However, alongside this, though not usually considered in any of the discussions of international education mentioned above, nor forming any part of the annual survey on the postgraduate experience in Britain (Kulej and Park 2008), there are equally important concerns about the connections and involvements of certain groups of international students, especially Pakistan-domiciled and British Pakistani students. These have escalated through the eight years since the start of 'the War on Terror', the invasion of Iraq, and the PM Initiatives.

For instance,

- There have been attempts to get British universities to keep 'a watchful eye' on Muslim students since 2006 and some have been asked to report (Muslim) students whose work shows signs of 'radicalisation' - particularly now that some of those involved in violent events in the UK have been found to have attended militant Islamist political groups at university (see Glees and Pope, 2005; and by contrast Malik 2009).
- Following the arrest of an MA student and clerical assistant at the University of Nottingham in 2008 under anti-terrorism laws for possessing copies of an Al Quaida training manual (both released without charge), its School of Politics and International Relations is inspecting reading lists for material 'with the capacity to incite violence'.
- Four Pakistani students at Liverpool Hope and Liverpool John Moore's universities were arrested as terrorism suspects, along with six other Pakistani men on student visas from the bogus Manchester College of Professional Studies. (As at Nottingham, all were released without charge but here they were immediately served with deportation orders and bail refused.)
- Finally, the issuing of UK visas has been tightened up and their costs raised from April 2009. Overseas students must now also have ID cards with biometric details, register with the police, and show they have money to pay their fees and maintain themselves in the UK. Since most visitors to the UK from Pakistan are relatives seeing their families, this has had severe effects also on British Pakistanis' everyday life.

These 'inexorable, irresistible demands for ever-tighter security measures' (see Castagnera 2009 for similar events in the US) produce a hostile atmosphere of suspicion and alienation - especially when they are reported in the media in Pakistan. This leaves us some way away from building the

'friendships with people from around the world, enabling us to understand more about each others' cultures' aspired to above.

As some corrective to this, and in the spirit of the Symposium – viz looking at social processes and power relations embedded in higher education itself, the power/knowledge conjunction, and the affective domain - this paper will consider these policy and practice changes in higher education in the light of some accounts by Pakistani residents who studied for doctoral and masters degrees in the UK between 2001-2008 (i.e. in the periods immediately prior to 9/11, 7/7 and subsequently). It will discuss their views on the relevance of the curriculum and pedagogy of the courses they attended; their social interactions with British and other international students; and focus particularly on if, when and how they were positioned as 'Muslims' and any suspicions of terrorism they encountered. It will also analyse their substantially different experiences as men and women, and any resultant changes in their identities and feelings towards the West.

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