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in defence of an unalienated politic: a critical appraisal of the 'No Outsiders' protests

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abstract

The trope of the repressive Muslim, obstinately attached to their regressive world views, recalcitrant antagoniser of modernity, has become a thoroughly familiar drama. Redundant spectacles abound: events often highly mediatised, substantiated by conservativism and liberalism alike, deployed as justification for policing, surveillance and invasion. The 2019 protests against the 'No Outsiders' LGBT lessons held in Birmingham, England are one such spectacle. Foregoing the dominant portrayal of the protests as an event of Muslim homophobia, I instead examine the social processes that render the event exceptional in the British imaginary and the statecraft it subsequently enables. First, the protests' production as a spectacular event is analysed through the historical conditions of Europe's self-constitution through Islam-as-Threat. It is through liberalism's amnesiac frame, one that erases its imperial and racist culpability, that the sexual exceptionalism that undergirds the spectacle of the protests can be understood. Second, reading the protests 'sideways', I argue, reveals how the displacement of homophobia onto Muslims continues liberalism's tradition of situating its Others as oppositional to its purported gendered and sexual freedoms. In this context, sex education as deradicalisation of Muslim pupils becomes normalised, even as British liberalism disavows racism. Thirdly, the inclusion of queer Muslims as the authentic voice emerging from the cross-sections of queer and Muslim identity is critiqued as a 'non-performativity'. Rather than offering a relational understanding of queer, Muslim and queer Muslim vulnerabilities, this inclusion elides an intersectional analysis of British homonationalism. I conclude by arguing for 'an unalienated politics' that is vigilant to co-optation, refusing to treat queerness as an exceptional site of injury. As such, how can we imagine the 'queer' in queer Muslim as a political position that refuses to capitulate to the hierarchisation of the human?

keywords

homonationalism; coloniality; liberalism; Islam; queer of colour critique; queer Muslim; intersectionality; race

introduction

The trope of the repressive Muslim, obstinately attached to their regressive world views, recalcitrant antagoniser of modernity, has become a thoroughly familiar drama. Redundant spectacles abound: events often highly mediatised, substantiated by conservativism and liberalism alike, deployed as justification for policing, surveillance and invasion. These events emblematise what is criticised as a globalised Islamophobia that legitimises itself through discourses of gender and sexuality. In Euro-America, misogyny, homophobia and 'unfreedom' are solidified in popular conceptions of Islam and its followers, with marginal Muslim subjectivities (Muslim women, queer and trans Muslims) instrumental to and instrumentalised for its authentication. This article argues that the critique of these dramas needs to complicate the post-9/11 periodisation and instead be understood as the operations of empire, whereby 'Western sexual exceptionalism' (Puar, 2007) is a familiar tactic of liberalism.

I offer a critical appraisal of the discursive formation around the 2019 Birmingham school protests against LGBT+ equality lessons in the UK, taking my analytic lead from Stuart Hall *et al*.'s approach in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (1978). Hall *et al*. begin by outlining the ideological functions and material impact of the moral panic around 'mugging' in 1970s Britain. Rather than dwell on the 'event' of mugging, Hall *et al.* seek to understand the functions of the moral panic that envelops the affective and political force of these events. They suggest that these events cannot be appraised in a historical and political vacuum: 'there is no simple "event" here to be understood, apart from the social processes by which such events are produced, perceived, classified, explained and responded to' (*ibid.*, p. 18). Similarly, this article is not invested in 'understanding' the protests as an event of Muslim homophobia. Instead, it examines the social processes that render the event exceptional in the British imaginary and the statecraft it subsequently enables.

First, the protests' production as a spectacular event is analysed through liberalism's 'economy of affirmation and forgetting' (Lowe, 2015), whereby liberalism's amnesiac frame continues to position its racial others, specifically Islam and its followers, as foils to its alleged freedoms, justifying this opposition through the language of gender and sexuality. Secondly, I propose a 'reading sideways' (Puar, 2007) of the hypervisibility of Muslim homophobia and the invisibility of the LGBT+ lessons' implication in counterextremism logics as imperative to the state's racist carceral agenda. Rather than an internal contradiction within liberalism, the weaponisation of sexual and gender difference is precisely how (muscular) liberalism can justify the securitisation of Muslim communities. Thirdly, the inclusion of queer Muslims as the authentic voice emerging from the cross-sections of queer and Muslim identity can be understood as a 'non-performativity' (Nash, 2019, p. 25). Rather than offering a relational understanding of queer, Muslim and queer Muslim vulnerabilities, this inclusion elides an intersectional analysis of British homonationalism. Finally, I conclude by arguing for 'an unalienated politics' (Haritaworn, Kuntsman and Posocco, 2015, p. 20) that is vigilant to co-optation, refusing to treat queerness as an exceptional site of injury. What would it mean to imagine the queer in queer Muslim as a political position that refuses to capitulate to the hierarchisation of the human?[1]

[1] I use queer Muslim and LGBT+ Muslim interchangeably throughout this article because the discursive landscape does so as well. This slippage is intended to illustrate the facile dualisms that position 'queer' as the radical, anti-assimilationist counterforce to the assimilationist impulses of 'LGBT+'. As such, this intentional slippage reflects how 'queer' as a category might be as amenable to assimilationist impulses as 'LGBT+'. In turn, the conclusion of this article privileges a queer investment in political positions over categories.

the No Outsiders programme and the Birmingham protests

On 5 September 2019, an open letter titled 'The government is hijacking LGBT+ sex education to bolster its counterterrorism strategy – it must stop now' (Inclusive Mosque Initiative *et al.*, 2019) was published on the *Independent*'s website. While its signatories, all LGBT+ individuals and organisations, supported the inclusion of LGBT+ identities in the lessons, the letter condemned the mobilisation of these identities towards 'harmful policies of state surveillance and the criminalisation of Muslim communities' (*ibid.*). At the time of publication, protests against the 'No Outsiders' programme had been ongoing for almost nine months outside various Birmingham primary schools. The No Outsiders curriculum is a series of lessons created and implemented by Andrew Moffat, assistant head teacher at Parkfield Community School. The programme teaches schoolchildren about 'British values' and the characteristics protected by the UK *Equality Act 2010* (2010), including sexual orientation. Issues arose in January when a Parkfield parent circulated a petition to remove mentions of homosexuality from the No Outsiders curriculum (*BBC News*, 2019). Within the month, 400 parents signed the petition, some parents removed their children from the school, and demonstrations against the programme began outside its gates (Parveen, 2019). The protesters were primarily Muslims, reflecting the demography of the neighbourhood and the school. They insisted that the LGBT+ aspects of No Outsiders were age inappropriate or against their faith. Soon, the protests began to be held daily, amassing crowds beyond pupils' parents and spreading to other schools in the city, most notably at Anderton Park School. Demonstrations were ongoing at the time of the letter's publication. Widely reported in the British media, the protests were framed as a socially conservative Muslim response at odds with the purported liberal tolerance that shapes No Outsiders' ethos and Britain's self-image.

Birmingham is the UK's second largest city. Muslims comprise over a quarter of its inhabitants, the largest number of Muslims in any local authority district (Birmingham City Council, 2013, p. 18). Consequently, Birmingham is a familiar backdrop for British anxieties about Islam and a frequent fixation of right-wing conspiracies. In 2015, for instance, during a *Fox News* segment on the Charlie Hebdo attacks, a 'terrorism expert' alleged that Birmingham was a 'totally Muslim' city 'where non-Muslims just simply don't go in' (Rawlinson, 2015). Although the city's racial and religious demography is frequently scrutinised, its co-constitution with class is ignored. Both Alum Rock and Sparkhill, the majority Muslim wards where Parkview and Anderton Park are respectively located, fall into the top 10 per cent of deprived wards nationally (Birmingham City Council, 2019, p. 9). Unsurprisingly, Birmingham's Muslim residents are discussed within the frame of cultural integration rather than, or in tandem with, working-class troubles. The city epitomises multicultural Britain: resentful of its racialised populations, in denial of its indebtedness to them. Right-wing hyperbole aside, the No Outsiders protests are not the first time a national controversy has erupted around Birmingham's Muslims. Arguably, an antecedent to the furore around the protests is the 2014 Trojan Horse affair. Trojan Horse pivoted on an alleged 'Islamist' operation to infiltrate the leadership of several inner-city Birmingham schools in order to run them according to 'extremist' principles (Struthers, 2017, p. 96). The origin of the scandal, an anonymous letter to Birmingham Council—an alleged excerpt of an exchange between conspirators of the plot—was proven to be fraudulent. No evidence of the existence of such an operation has been found (Shackle, 2017).

Nevertheless, in the wake of the Conservative government's official report on Trojan Horse, the 'active promotion' of Fundamental British Values (FBV) was made a statutory obligation for schools (Department

for Education and Lord Nash, 2014). These British values include democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. FBV was first defined within the Prevent duty, one of the four streams of CONTEST, the British counterterrorism strategy. Prevent is controversial particularly due to its 'pre-crime' approach: it claims to tackle 'the ideological challenge of terrorism' by preventing individual involvement in 'extremism' (Fernandez, 2018). FBV's explicit aim in schools is to combat radicalisation through the logic of pre-emptive detection, transforming frontline staff of public services such as healthcare institutions, universities and schools into counterextremism agents. Primary school teachers, for example, are trained to identify students who exhibit 'risks' of radicalisation and refer them to the Channel, the government's deradicalisation programme (*ibid.*). Prevent's deterrence logic vindicates the reformulation of racialised surveillance into goodwill pre-crime intervention. Both FBV and Prevent are criticised for their securitisation of public services and disproportionate targeting of Muslims (Lander, 2016; Fernandez, 2018; Younis and Jadhav, 2020).

No Outsiders operates explicitly within this counterextremism framework, yet public discourse elides the securitisation that inheres in the programme. Instead, the media fixated on the homophobia of the protests and the demography of the protesters. The protests are contrasted with the allegedly innocuous nature of the programme's LGBT+ inclusivity. A video published on the BBC's website, for instance, highlights that the 'books used in the programme include stories about a dog that doesn't feel like it fits in, two male penguins that raise a chick together and a boy who likes to dress up like a mermaid' (Frieze and Everett, 2019). The video concludes with a cursory statement that British Values are taught to 'reduce radicalisation and bullying', without further explanation (*ibid.*). Elsewhere, coverage has urged for solidarity between Muslim and LGBT communities as commonly minoritised, such as an opinion article in *The Guardian* by columnist Owen Jones (2019), arguing to not 'let the Birmingham school protests perpetuate divisions when a common enemy—the far right—is once again looming'. There has also been an emphasis on queer/LGBT+ Muslims in light of the protests, highlighting their position as subjects 'caught in the middle', finding themselves at the crossroads of communities pitted against each other (Halima, 2019; Hitchings, 2019; Hunte, 2019; Iqbal, 2019; Mir, 2019; Stripe, 2019; Card, 2020). In May 2019, the Birmingham Pride Parade was led by Moffat and two queer Muslim activists, Saima Razzaq and Khakhan Qureishi, who organised against the protests and consistently voiced support for No Outsiders (Duffy, 2019).

Rather than question the underlying carceral logics of 'equalities lessons', public discourse on the protests favours yet another regurgitation of the culture clash trope between Western liberal values and Islam. The dominant narrative aims to edify its audience, emphasising the necessity of No Outsiders for Muslim children and revealing the extent to which the public has become desensitised to everyday securitisation. The letter in the *Independent* posed a rare discursive intervention in an otherwise homogenous landscape of support for No Outsiders and liberal indignation against the protests. None of the aforementioned articles question No Outsiders' explicit aim to reduce radicalisation through imparting 'British' values, nor do they call attention to the securitisation of Muslim pupils. The protests execute a familiar drama of 'queer lovers and hateful others' (Haritaworn, 2015), yet scant attention is paid to analysing the regurgitation of this trope. In the next section, I analyse the imperial origins of this drama, particularly its production within liberalism and its oppositional relation to Islam.

on the production of an event: interrogating liberalism's amnesiac frame

How can a reflection on 'colonial exceptionalism', as the letter published in the *Independent* pinpoints, be helpful in a critical understanding of Europe's consistent demonisation of Islam? What is lost when the post-9/11 political order becomes the normative framework to understand the contemporary subjectification of Muslims? What is gained when the deployment of race, gender and sexuality is seen as the persistent machinations of empire? I argue that this exceptionalism needs to be understood as a continuing practice of Europe's self-constitution rather than a mere resonance with past tactics of colonial governance. These questions of coloniality and its contemporary tactics subtend my appraisal of the protests.

The protests, I argue, are structured through freedom fallacies that are intrinsic to liberalism-as-political-philosophy's conceptualisation of society and 'Man'. They are also produced in the affective register of indignation that is symptomatic of liberal politics' materially hollow claims of progressiveness. I necessarily oscillate between these denotations of liberalism because their evocations—from the political philosophy of liberalism that is foundational to British colonialism's expansionist projects, to the contemporary government policy of 'muscular liberalism', to the framing of 'British Values' as liberal tolerance—do so as well. Raymond Williams (1985 [1976], p. 181) explains how leftists' pejorative if not mocking use of 'liberal' underlies a more crucial assessment 'that liberalism is a doctrine based on individualist theories of man and society and is thus in fundamental conflict not only with socialist but with most strictly social theories'. As such, I draw on feminist, queer and postcolonial critiques of liberalism both as a political theory of possessive individualism and as a politics of tolerance to elucidate the raced, gendered and sexualised exclusions it consolidates in the name of freedom. The discursive production of and response to the protests can be understood within the obfuscated continuities between British liberalism's imperial hostility towards Islam and the politics of exclusion inherent to British 'tolerance' of so-called diverse populations, particularly Muslims.

Maya Mikdashi and Jasbir K. Puar (2016) argue that the classed, gendered, raced and sexualised discourses on Islam that undergird the War on Terror's perpetuity are not novel but rather are a renewal of pre-existing discourses. They are a reiteration of a familiar imperial ideology of Western ascendancy whereby Europe articulates its (liberal) self through and against its (illiberal) Others. It is a process described aptly by Lisa Lowe (2015, p. 3) as an 'economy of affirmation and forgetting' that is immanent to liberalism as the philosophy of nineteenth-century British imperial expansion. This economy 'civilises and develops freedoms for "man" in modern Europe and North America, while relegating others to geographical and temporal spaces that are constituted as backward, uncivilised, and unfree' (*ibid.*). Understood through this frame, liberalism's values of individual rights, secularism, democratic citizenship, economic freedoms and the more contemporary additions of sexual and women's rights are predicated on the violent exclusions of the colonised and racialised subjectivities it itself creates (Mehta, 1999; Lowe 2015; Massad, 2015). The parameters of who constitutes an 'other' and how they sustain liberalism's exclusionary notion of the free 'Man' (Wynter, 2003)—both the ontological and epistemological standard of its proper subject—help us understand how civilisational notions of difference create the categorical unfree racial other within and outside Europe. This over-representation of 'Man' (*ibid.*) and its attendant exclusionary notion of the human is sustained through gendered,

sexualised and classed difference, while simultaneously obfuscating the very ideological and material histories through which this difference comes to be known.

Religion and the religious were essential to the emergence of liberalism, serving as one of the main foils to its alleged democratic and secular freedoms. The dominant representation of this emergent binary in the nineteenth century has been the struggle between state and church but undergirds the less interrogated dualism between the Christian imperial centre and uncivilised religiosity of its colonies and opponents. Joseph Massad's (2015, p. 15) critical account of the history of liberalism is helpful here in understanding Islam's role in Europe's self-constitution, whereby 'whatever point of origin is chosen for the story of Europe to begin, "Islam" seems to have a foundational role at every turn'. In his thorough engagement of the intellectual and political histories of Western liberalism's relation to Islam, Massad (*ibid.*, p. 60) argues that British and French colonial power are merely antecedents to current American hegemony. Modern American preoccupations with Islam and 'Islamism' in relation to its foreign policy are derivative of nineteenth- and twentieth-century British and French anxieties about Islam's consequences for their colonial interests. Islam, then, has been a continued source of anxiety to imperial powers even as it was positioned as their inferior. Europe's self-constitution relied on oppositional binaries, including (normatively Protestant Christian) secular reason against a supposed fanatic (Islamic) religiosity. Further, it reduces Islam to what Saba Mahmood (2013, p. 147) has described as a 'single cultural formation', a homogenising move that establishes a reductive referential context. While the prime of the British imperial project has passed, Britain maintains its investment in Islam-as-threat through its own nationalist project and alliance with US hegemony.

If liberalism's economy of affirmation relied on creating colonised and racialised subjectivities to set Europeans apart from uncivilised others, then this economy sustains itself through gendered and sexualised logics. Joan Scott (2018, p. 22), speaking through Fanon, observes that 'desire served as a nexus for gender and race in the psychic politics of Europeans; gender distinctions were the product of the complex entanglements of family, race, and nation'. This is no less true regarding Europe's historical orientation to Islam and its followers, as Scott (*ibid.*) explains: 'race was not only sexualised (as Fanon describes it), but it was also given a religious connotation. Christianity was the sign of white superiority; Islam was represented as one of the "other" religions practiced by inferior peoples of color'. Thus, returning to Lowe (2015), the project of the modern liberal European nation has always relied on affirming itself as superior to (its racialised idea of) Islam via gendered and sexualised logics of civilisational progress. Yet, it simultaneously relies on a forgetting of these material and ideological histories, even as it constantly refers back to the social knowledges produced in their wake.

For Stuart Hall (2019 [2000]), the British iteration of liberal amnesia is central to the nation's relation to 'the Multicultural Question' in the post-war, postcolonial landscape. Multiculturalism as a novel conundrum of managing cultural pluralism is the product of an imperial investment in the universalist myth of British homogeneity and the erasure of imperial projects of colonisation and slavery in the national imaginary. It is the disruptive force par excellence for the British state, as its formulation of citizenship as individual liberty and formal equality is incapable of reckoning with the material realities of racialised exclusion and injustice that are perpetrated *in the name of liberal universalisms and freedoms*. While multiculturalism as a state policy crumbles due to the state's inability to contend with its own racialised exclusions, the subjects of these exclusions are held to blame.

This history of British liberalism's orientation towards racial and ethnic difference is what allows for the implementation of a contemporary 'muscular liberalism'. First used by former Prime Minister David Cameron in 2011, it is now a national policy that explicitly distances itself from multiculturalism's 'failures':

> Frankly, we need a lot less of the passive tolerance of recent years and a much more active, muscular liberalism. A passively tolerant society says to its citizens, as long as you obey the law we will just leave you alone. It stands neutral between different values. But I believe a genuinely liberal country does much more; it believes in certain values and actively promotes them. Freedom of speech, freedom of worship, democracy, the rule of law, equal rights regardless of race, sex or sexuality. It says to its citizens, this is what defines us as a society: *to belong here is to believe in these things*. (Cameron, 2011, emphasis added)

Here, the invocation of liberalism and its 'freedom' values signals a determination to rectify the past error of tolerance. While Cameron feigns a sense of government responsibility, he also establishes a norm of liberal (British) citizenship. A thorough critique of the dubious claim that Britain has, at any point in its modern history, practised tolerance to a fault is beyond the scope of this article.[2] However, it is important to note that the need for muscular liberalism is couched in the existence of uncivilised and unfree populations. Belonging is for those citizens who can adhere to these British freedom 'things'. Here, we see the limits of liberalism articulated by Hall (2019 [2000]) and echoed further by Gail Lewis (2005): tolerance is claimed as a quintessentially British principle, even as the object-to-be-tolerated, the immigrant, is disciplined for their unassimilability to the nation's gender, sexual, familial norms. While the multiculturalism of the past analysed by Lewis and Hall used the language of inclusion to mask its exclusions, the muscular liberalism of the present pares down the pretence. Muscular liberalism proclaims a tacit threat by the no longer passively tolerant government (the veracity of these claims of passivity is unquestioned)—a threat of exclusion for those who do not adhere to these British values, who choose, instead, to be backwards and unfree.

It is through this amnesiac frame—one that erases liberalism's imperial and racist culpability—that we can understand the exceptionalism within the spectacle of the protests. 'Securitization shapes the identity of the securitized and the securitizer' (Croft, 2012, p. 15) such that white, liberal 'Britishness' is constituted by racialised Muslim illiberality. The spectre of the unfree other demands the active promotion of these British values which then necessitate the securitisation of everyday life. It justifies Prevent's 'anti-liberal project' in order to 'secure and perpetuate liberalism' (Boukalas, 2019, p. 1). 'Muscular' liberalism attempts to set itself apart from multiculturalism, when in actuality both function exactly as intended: through violent exclusions of populations from the notion of the human. In this context, No Outsiders' link to national counter-extremism is normalised as a necessary strategy towards an inherently illiberal group.

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[2] Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (2000 [1983], p. 28) provides a comprehensive and illuminating account of the fundamental role of 'racialism' for Europe's self-constitution from the eleventh century onwards, particularly in the development of English national consciousness and its working class: 'as an enduring principle of European social order, the effects of racialism were bound to appear in the social expression of every strata of every European society no matter the structures upon which they were formed. None was immune'.

an intervention into the explanation: reading No Outsiders 'sideways'

In *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007, p. 120), Puar argues for 'reading sideways': a horizontal form of analysis of 'seemingly unrelated and often disjunctively situated moments and their effects'. This section attempts a sideways reading of the protests, one where the state's operations of power, the events it produces, and the sexual and racial others it creates are seen as constitutive of its moments of benevolence. I am interested in the elisions around securitisation in the discursive formation of the protests, specifically the absence of any substantial discussion of Prevent's role in No Outsiders. This is not meant to be a hierarchising move to compare the outrage against Muslim homophobia against the lack of scandal around racialised state surveillance. Rather, a 'cross-reading' reveals how the hypervisibility of the former and the invisibility of the latter are not coincidental but rather imperative to the state's operations of power.

The education sector is integral to British liberalism's civilising strategy: it must adopt an active role to teach Muslim students into effective integration within the national social order. In other words, the 'passive' liberalism of the past has failed to produce abiding, civilised Muslim citizen-subjects. The institutionalisation of muscular liberalism manifests in the form of the Prevent duty in schools and the need to impart FBV to schoolchildren. A 2018 speech by Amanda Spielman, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) Chief Inspector, embodies how the application of British Values perpetuates liberalism's creation of unfree others. Spielman echoes Cameron's denunciation of past passivity and the urgency of muscular liberalism:

> It should go without saying that the concerns I am raising here are not about mainstream Anglican practice in our schools, nor for that matter most mainstream Jewish or Muslim practice. But it is undoubtedly true—and books we've found displayed in schools encouraging husbands to beat their wives are a sorry testament to this—that there are segments of particular faiths who are determined to use our schools to promote beliefs and practices that are an anathema to British values. (Spielman, 2018)

We see here a familiar state denial of racial profiling, even as it evokes the gendered tropes that typify conceptions of Muslim families. Instead, this articulation of muscular liberalism assures us that its concerns about illiberal individuals are an equal opportunity exclusion: it is not only Muslims who are scrutinised, but Jews and Christians as well; it is not all Muslims that are targeted—the 'mainstream' ones are safe. Left unexplained is what constitutes mainstream Muslim (or, for that matter, Jewish or Christian) practice. Certain 'segments' of the population threaten British social cohesion and its ironclad gendered and sexual values. Spielman's speech draws on images of violently dysfunctional families unable to internalise proper gendered and sexual subjectivity that are characteristic of the colonial reverberations within British tolerance discourse (Lewis, 2005).

Although FBV's institutionalisation is framed as a neutral strategy, which groups are seen as risking British values reveals their civilising aims. Critical scholarly literature on FBV in schools argues that it signals 'how the twin spectres of counter-terrorism and securitisation have invaded the professional pedagogic space' (Lander, 2016, p. 274), especially since the definition of FBV was transplanted from the Prevent strategy (Struthers, 2017). In light of these securitised origins, the notion of specifically 'British' values is disputed for its exclusionary and nationalist motivations (Lander, 2016; Struthers, 2017). Moreover, the ambiguity around how exactly FBV is to be implemented, combined with the

potential for teachers to 'bring uninformed views about particular ethnic groups to the classroom' (Maylor, 2016, p. 324), is particularly harrowing for its potential for discriminatory interpretation. This is demonstrated as much in the 2017–2018 survey on Prevent referrals (UK Home Office, 2017). The education sector was the biggest source of referrals at 33 per cent (*ibid.*, p. 9). Fifteen- to 20-year-olds made up the largest age group of referrals, and under-15s the second largest from total referrals (*ibid.*). The most common cause of concern for a referral was Islamist extremism, at 44 per cent (*ibid.*). Under-15s made up the largest group of referrals by age group for Islamist extremism at 26 per cent (*ibid.*, p. 12). In *Carceral Capitalism* (2018, p. 243), Jackie Wang argues that in 'in marking subjects as potential risks, they are actually produced as such'. These statistics clearly demonstrate that discursively deeming Muslim children as risks produces them as prime suspects under Prevent. Securitisation is successful insofar as it has cemented teachers as agents of the securitised imaginary.

It is through this understanding of the intimate link between the securitisation agenda and the education sector that 'No Outsiders' aims become troubling. A slide from a presentation by Parkfield head teacher Hazel Pulley explains how the programme is used directly in response to Prevent and the necessity of teaching the celebration of difference to its '98.9% Muslim' students (Pulley, 2019, p. 2). As such, there is no ambiguity regarding No Outsiders' securitised orientation specifically to Muslim children. One of the slides quotes Moffat on the programme's ethos:

> We can't simply be telling children that their beliefs are wrong or unacceptable; we have to be delivering a curriculum that enables children to understand the benefits that exist in a society where diversity and differences are celebrated. Furthermore we need our children to want to be part of that society, and we have to sell it to them; *that desire may not come naturally by itself.* (*ibid.*, emphasis added)

Once again, liberal tolerance's rhetoric obscures that Muslim students' racialised difference is what welcomes speculation on their lack of an inherent desire to be part of British society. When it comes to policing, Jackie Wang (2018, p. 43) argues that 'predictions are much more about constructing the future through present management of subjects categorized as threats or risks'. Prevent's profiling logics similarly operate on 'culture-race-religion' as possessing predictive potential that produces Muslims as threats.[3] Even if the context of Moffat's words is not intended specifically for Muslim students, their internal logics of successful integration perpetuate a colonial civilising attitude towards pupils (and by extension their families and broader community).[4] In this frame, Muslim children's culture inherently lacks a respect for difference and a desire to integrate; thus, it cannot possibly be racist to use state securitisation to address them as potential threats. If these pupils' cultural and religious beliefs (the slippage between the two is intentional) are *de facto* considered

[3] The conflation of culture, race and religion is symptomatic of what Paul Gilroy (2002 [1987]) conceptualises as Britain's consolidation of the nation via 'new racism' across the political spectrum, whereby race is framed in terms of culture and identity rather than through the language of biology.

[4] Moffat has described No Outsiders as a tool to reduce radicalisation as part of 'the government's Prevent agenda to promote cohesion' (Lightfoot, 2018). This continues into his doctoral research at the University of Birmingham on 'the role of schools in reducing radicalisation' (Routledge, book description of *Reclaiming Radical Ideas in Schools: Preparing Young Children for Life in Modern Britain* by Andrew Moffat, https://www.routledge.com/Reclaiming-Radical-Ideas-in-Schools-Preparing-Young-Children-for-Life-in/Moffat/p/book/9781138564312 [last accessed 15 December 2020]). Given No Outsiders' operation with the Prevent framework, it is clear what kind of radicalisation, and which presumed subjects of its reduction, are at the centre of this research.

incompatible, if not oppositional, to British values, then 'early intervention', as No Outsiders argues, does indeed become 'essential' (Pulley, 2019, p. 18). Securitisation becomes not a necessary evil but a benevolent act: assistance in assimilation as harm reduction to an innate risk of radicalisation.

How can we understand the elision of state surveillance in the spectacle of the protests? In other words, how can we read sideways the hypervisibility of Muslim homophobia alongside the invisibility of No Outsider's securitisation logics? Reading sideways exposes how the spectacle of the protests is made possible through the enterprise of British homonationalism and its imperial hostility to Islam. On the role of sexuality in coloniality, Ann Stoler (1995, p. 346) observes that 'sexuality illustrates the iconography of rule, not its pragmatics; sexual asymmetries are tropes to depict other centers of power'. Sexuality continues to be the iconography of Western exceptionalism, instrumentalised to affirm the opposition between liberalism and Islam. The sexual asymmetries shift from demonising excess in Islam and its followers to admonishing repressed paucity. The accusation of an illiberal approach to sexuality becomes the iconography of state domination while simultaneously masking its pragmatics.

Cross-reading the teaching of LGBT+ equality within a securitised agenda reveals that these are not contradictory effects. Rather, it is precisely how liberalism's amnesiac frame operates. Not a disjuncture at all but an intentional masking of their relatedness, sex education as deradicalisation becomes a practice of racist, imperial governmentality even as (muscular) liberalism disavows racism. Coloniality, gender, race and sexuality continue to shape the 'psychic politics of Europeans' (Scott, 2018, p. 22), whereby Britain's self-constitution depends on the continued exclusion of illiberal racial others. While liberalism effaces the nation's exclusions, it also proffers integration to those on the very margins it creates. Queer ascendancies achieved through sexual exceptionalism render disposable 'those who are unassimilable in liberal regimes of rights and representation' (Haritaworn, Kuntsman and Posocco, 2015, p. 1). Reading these moments 'sideways'—as simultaneous rather than sequential—allows for an understanding of how the response to the protests has relied on nefarious inclusions as well. Puar's (2007) conceptualisation of 'homonationalism' is useful in understanding how some acceptable queers are integrated into a state's notions of normative citizenship. In the next section, I critique a particular homonationalist queer Muslim response to the protests.

queer model minority exceptionalism: critiquing the queer Muslim response

Queer Muslims as a group existing at the intersection of queer and Muslim identity are positioned as uniquely able to contend with the homophobia of the protesters and the benevolent state institutionalisation of LGBT+ equality. Much of Queer of Color Critique's engagement with queer Muslims (Puar, 2007; Haritaworn, Tauqir and Erdem, 2008; El-Tayeb, 2012; Haritaworn, Kuntsman and Posocco, 2015) analyses their instrumentalisation and silencing for homonationalist ends, interrogating the regurgitation of tropes of Muslim misogyny and homophobia.[5] However, this article argues for a more rigorous politics, one that does not assume that when a queer Muslim speaks, they will automatically align themself in opposition to those who have historically spoken over them. In the context of the

[5] The American spelling of 'Color' in 'Queer of Color Critique' is a deliberate nod to its origins in the US Academy. For a critical engagement of the limits and possibilities of Queer of Color Critique's scholarly locations and dispersals, see Lakhani (2020).

protests, a particular queer Muslim experience becomes reified as the acceptable response from the margins regardless of the political orientation of the narrative.

The discursive formation around the protests includes 'giving voice' to LGBT+ Muslims, as seen through several articles and interviews published in response. These interventions overwhelmingly assert the need for LGBT+ equality lessons in Muslim communities. This includes interviews of and opinion pieces by LGBT+ Muslims in publications such as *BBC News*, *The Guardian*, *ITV*, *Metro* and *Vice*, and events in LGBT+ contexts such as a panel discussion at the 2019 UK Black Pride (Haidrani, 2019; Hitchings, 2019; Hunte, 2019; Iqbal, 2019; Mir, 2019). Common themes cut across these narratives: they tend to address the potential psychic harm of the protests for students who may be LGBT+; there are recurring observations that LGBT+ Muslims would have benefitted from programmes like No Outsiders during their own childhoods; and they often stress the need for a programme like No Outsiders in Muslim communities. These articles situate queer Muslims as the authoritative voice regarding the protests. This sentiment is encapsulated in a sound bite from a trustee of Imaan, the largest LGBT+ Muslim charity in the UK: 'let queer Muslims like me have our own voice. Let me have my own agency. Just like the protesters got media coverage, we need and deserve that too' (Haidrani, 2019).

None of these narratives mention Prevent, let alone question the role of or need for British Values or counter-extremism policies in equality lessons. In fact, bringing Prevent to the forefront has resulted in pushback. The letter published in the *Independent*, for instance, was criticised by queer Muslims who have been hypervisible in light of the protests. Saima Razzaq and Khakhan Qureishi, both of whom were interviewed by multiple outlets in relation to the protests, criticised the letter as a detraction from the 'inherent homophobia and transphobia'[6] in Muslim communities, disagreeing that No Outsiders is about 'state surveillance', and rather 'this is about our community protesting on their children knowing about the existence of LGBTQI communities—including Muslim ones'.[7] Notably, none of the LGBT+ Muslim charities operating in London were signatories of the letter.

The dismissal of Prevent and the resistance to the letter by queer Muslims who have deliberately chosen to intervene in the protests demonstrates a tendency to position queerness as an exceptional site of injury. In this discursive landscape, calling attention to the homonationalism demonstrated in the response to the protests and the relative invisibility of Prevent is to be cast aside for the more urgent struggle against Muslim homophobia. Analysis of the event begins and ends at experience without questioning the production and instrumentalisation of said experience. Joan Scott (1991, p. 779, emphasis added), on the limitations of experience as evidence, argues that: 'making visible the experience of a different group exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but *not their inner workings or logics*; we know that difference exists, but we don't understand it as relationally constituted'. The reification of identity by this queer Muslim response enables the denial of homonationalism and a dismissal—or worse, tacit support—of No Outsiders' connection to counterextremism. Exceptionalising Muslim homophobia and the injury it causes falls into a hierarchising trap: sexuality becomes comparable to race rather than constituted *by* it.

[6] Saima Razzaq (she/her), Twitter post, https://twitter.com/McSaima/status/1169607868376592386 [last accessed 19 January 2020].
[7] Saima Razzaq (she/her), Twitter post, https://twitter.com/mcsaima/status/1169611473846489094 [last accessed 19 January 2020].

The privileging of certain queer Muslim voices indicates an intersectional dilemma. An intersectional analysis of the event, specifically of the deliberate foregrounding of queer Muslims who are either ignorant or dismissive of the programme's ties to Prevent, can reveal how 'progressive politics can shore up the security state' (Collins and Bilge, 2020 [2016], pp. 155–158). An intersectional frame would elucidate the co-constitutive dynamic between homophobia and homonationalism, making possible a politics that refuses both, rather than alienating one from the other. Instead, what we see at play is a misuse of intersectionality through the rhetoric of liberal tolerance. Jennifer Nash (2019, p. 25) argues that the co-option of intersectionality within diversity projects produces what she calls 'non-performativity': whereby 'a commitment can be made to something as a way of not bringing something about'. While Nash is speaking specifically to the institutionalisation of intersectionality within the university, we can see this non-performativity at play in the dynamic of 'giving voice' to the putative 'authentic' voice at the cross sections of queer and Muslim identity: queer Muslims. However, this inclusion serves to elide an intersectional analysis of the securitisation of Muslims in Britain. Rather than offering a relational understanding of queer, Muslim and queer Muslim vulnerabilities, this demonstrates what Puar (2007) has described as a diasporic queer iteration of model minority exceptionalism. A select few queer Muslims are claimed as authentic interlocutors, positioning 'queerness as an exemplary or liberatory site devoid of nationalist impulses' (*ibid.*, p. 173). Such a flattening approach falls into many different iterations of liberal exceptionalism's myths: Muslims are inherently and exceptionally homophobic; Muslims lag behind Britain's exceptional acceptance of (sexual) difference; queer Muslims are victims of a straight and homophobic Muslim community; queerness is an exceptional site of injury.

Thus, an engagement with the protests that is ignorant of its production within the histories of coloniality and liberalism precludes a queer, anti-racist solidarity. The exclusive focus on sexual difference as a site of marginalisation refuses a relational politics: it falls into liberalism's trap of affirming exclusionary freedoms while simultaneously demonising its racial others for being unfree. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1996 [1979], p. 35) argues that this co-option is inevitable: 'the putative center welcomes selective inhabitants of the margin in order to better exclude the margin. And it is the center that offers the official explanation; or, the center is defined and reproduced by the explanation that it can express'. The queer Muslim response legitimises muscular liberalism's discourse, allowing the British state to define itself through a celebration of sexual difference even as it weaponises religious difference. It reflects the urgency of a queer refusal rooted in a resistance to these racist, carceral logics. How can a queer Muslim politics acknowledge queer precarity without falling into the trap of queer exceptionalism? What would it mean to take seriously feminist, anti-racist critique that recognises homophobia and homonationalism as correlates?

conclusion: in defence of an 'unalienated' politic

This analysis of the discursive formation of the protests is intended to be a call to reflect on its discursive and material implications. Understood as an event produced by liberalism's amnesiac frame, the No Outsiders protests demonstrate how coloniality masks its operations through evoking liberalism's freedom 'things' (Cameron, 2011), sabotaging solidarity in the margins it itself creates and enforces. Regardless of whether this manifests as silence or explicit approval of liberalism's tactics of exclusion, the aforementioned queer Muslim response enables a dangerous justification to racist surveillance regimes precisely because it is easily co-opted as an endorsement from the specious margins. It

underscores the need to confront the precise machinations of coloniality, especially its seemingly benevolent or mundane manifestations. No Outsiders' compliance with Prevent is but one of the many examples of how the maintenance of the centre–margin divide is obfuscated through the language of liberalism. The queer Muslim response critiqued in this article demonstrates how liberalism's offers for selective inclusion only serve the maintenance of this divide.

Where to go from here? We may turn to Spivak's (1996 [1979], p. 35) suggestion to understand that 'the center itself is marginal', not by 'pointing my accusing finger at the center', but instead 'by implicating myself in the center and sensing what politics make it marginal'. In other words, how can we envision a queer Muslim response that anticipates liberalism's invitation to become a beneficiary of its dehumanising logics? What does a queer Muslim refusal look like? How can we formulate a queer Muslim dissent that 'engages in unalienated politics' (Haritaworn, Kuntsman and Posocco, 2015, p. 16), where the acceptance of some is not contingent on the violent disposal of others—where we refuse to secure our own safety through collusion with regimes of incarceration and securitisation? As Haritaworn, Kuntsman and Posocco (*ibid.*) ask, 'where the violence of the most powerful is scandalised at least as loudly as the acts of those thus subjugated?'.

No Outsiders' LGBT+ lessons' focus on sexual and gender 'identity' falls within the limiting frame of rights and representation. In turn, its language structured the most visible queer Muslim response. What would it mean to imagine the *queer* in queer Muslim as not simply an identity used to claim tenuous rights but a political position that refuses to capitulate to the hierarchisation of the human? How can refusal be used as the rigour and force of an anti-assimilationist queer politic? Although no UK LGBT+ Muslim charities were signatories of the letter in the *Independent*, the first listed signatory is the UK-based Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI). A self-described feminist and queer-inclusive mosque, IMI does not claim to speak on behalf of, or to represent, queer Muslims; however, as a signatory, it demonstrates the possibility of an unalienated politic: one that speaks to the desire to articulate a feminist- and queer-inclusive Muslim subjectivity that challenges homophobia without capitulating to the Prevent agenda, and, by extension, British homonationalism.

An unalienated politic spurns the moral framework of innocence that creates a demand for 'respectable subjects' in our anti-racist struggles (Wang, 2018). It imagines that we take seriously the task of scandalising and loudly opposing structural violence, especially when it is vocalised through the siren song of inclusion. We may do well to heed the advice of queer and trans abolitionist thought: 'the true potential of queer and trans politics cannot be found in attempting to reinforce our tenuous right to exist by undermining someone else's' (Bassichis, Lee and Spade, 2015 [2011], p. 37). A queer Muslim refusal, then, chooses to understand its own marginality as interdependent, refuses to yield to the flattening discourse of the centre, demonstrates a vigilance to the likelihood of co-option. It may even seize the opportunity to articulate its refusal within a call to abolish Prevent and the concomitant racist, securitised machinations of the state. An unalienated politics, one that pays attention to the historical conditions of coloniality, necessitates mistrust towards propositions of inclusion, instead recognising the violence immanent in the proposition itself.

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