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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:
Verlag Barbara Budrich

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für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der
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In the Name of 'Rights' – BAMER Women, Terrorism and Violence Against Women

Amrit Wilson and Sumanta Roy

In the various writings about violence against minority ethnic women and children, particularly the activism and state policies aimed at combating it, comparatively little has been said about the 'war on terror', and the new rights-based agenda and their impact on BAMER[1] women facing violence in the UK. In this chapter, we examine just one area of this impact – the effects of this policy on specialist BAMER services and routes to safety for BAMER women. Ever since the beginning of the debate on forced marriage and the proposal for a specific criminal law in 2005, the British state has carefully developed a public image of being concerned about gender-based violence in BAMER families and communities. But in the same period the state has implemented a number of policies which have impacted enormously on women from the same groups. Here we shall examine the policies of 'community cohesion' which have served to justify the closure of specialist refuges and even threatened women-only refuges; the so-called 'war on terror' with its justification and establishment of widespread surveillance and profiling; and the shift towards criminal justice responses to violence against women (VAW), favouring a punitive approach, under the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, at the expense of preventative work, as well as changes in the Race Relations legislation at a time of increasing racism and Islamophobia.

British racism and Islamophobia

A strand of Islamophobia has long been a part of British racism, with its roots in the crusades, orientalism and colonialism (Said 1978). But when did the comparatively recent phase of virulent anti-Muslim racism really start? While the media and various 'common-sense' views suggest that Is-

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1   BAMER stands for Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee women.

lamophobia began with the horrific attacks of 9/11, the experience of BAMER women tells a different story. They invariably emphasize that while 9/11 led to an enormous escalation of Islamophobia, for the majority of Muslims of all communities (and other South Asian groups), deep-rooted racism had impacted on their lives throughout the era of multiculturalism, shaping immigration laws, welfare state policies, the attitudes of the police, discrimination in employment and spilling over into violent attacks on the streets.

Working-class South Asian communities in the North of England, most of them Pakistani and Bangladeshi, which had faced the worst effects of deindustrialization in the 1980s, remained, in the 1990s, locked in a limbo of poor educational opportunities and unemployment. In towns such as Burnley, Accrington, Oldham, Blackburn and Bradford, a generation has grown up in communities, white and South Asian, which are among Britain's most impoverished one percent. These communities were kept apart not by difference but by racism; at the same time South Asian encounters with the police and other agencies too were often shaped by racism. In the 1990s, the last phase of the multicultural era, the demonisation of Islam in America's global strategy had begun to feed into the British media, and into the ways in which minority ethnic communities were constructed, generating a specifically anti-Muslim racism. The construction of the 'Muslim' man as fanatical, fundamentalist, violent and owing allegiance to forces external – and hostile – to Europe came to the foreground in racist imagery (Kundnani 2007). Particularly since 9/11, these images have become much more widespread and the notion of all Muslims as suspect and dangerous has been consolidated by the media and by anti-terrorism policies which target whole communities. So intense is this politics of fear that even children as young as eleven are being asked to report their peers to their teachers and to the Police should they be identified as holding potentially extremist attitudes (BubblieKang 2010).

The images of Muslim women, which have been deeply inscribed in popular consciousness in this period, have a specific dichotomy. On the one hand, they are seen as victims, horrifically oppressed by the cruel and backward men in their families, with the newspapers often reporting 'forced marriages', brutal parents and victimized daughters. On the other, and increasingly, they are seen as aiding terrorism or else being terrorists themselves. All these factors have contributed to the rise in the numbers of attacks on Muslims – men, women and children-recorded by the police. A recent report also points out that many of these crimes remain hidden: *'The majority of anti-Muslim hate crimes are not reported to police either because of a lack of confidence in the police or because victims are unaware of a police interest'* (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010: 11).

In the last twenty years or so, culture and religion have also been conflated and populations which had earlier been categorised according to language or region of origin are now categorised by their religion above all else, even where those who identify with a religion, for example Islam, are from a diversity of groups. In the same period, the heightening Islamophobia and racism increased the ghettoisation of many working-class communities, particularly South Asian Muslim, and this, together with the acceptance by the state of South Asian patriarchy, led to the collusion of statutory and voluntary organizations in upholding patriarchal stipulations. At the same time, the focus on religion and culture made it possible for the state to ignore social and economic factors, power imbalances and institutionalized discrimination, which all contribute to women's marginalization (Dustin n.d.). This made South Asian women's struggles against violence and oppression far harder. They were hampered too by the extreme racism of media reportage of gender violence. It was against this background and under pressure from South Asian women's groups to respond to the sometimes extreme violence they faced that the state began to propose policies that appeared to confront 'Muslim' patriarchy (Siddiqui 2006). While multiculturalism had allowed the state to consolidate and strengthen both South Asian patriarchy and the construction of South Asian women as victims, state agencies and government statements began to now appear to confront it, reacting with shock and horror as though patriarchy was a monster unknown, which had suddenly appeared from an 'alien' and 'backward' land.

The first effects of this new confrontation were to be found in the enactment of the Forced Marriage Civil legislation which was brought in despite the opposition by the majority of the BAMER VAW sector. These groups argued that it was unnecessary because existing laws on abduction and domestic violence were adequate to deal with forced marriage, and what was required instead was the revision and proactive enforcement of these laws. It was also pointed out that forced marriage is a very broad category which includes nebulous issues such as emotional pressure which can be hard to evidence. The debate around the new law and its implementation was accompanied by the state and media's increasing obsession with forced marriage on another level which undoubtedly increased racism and Islamophobia. However, the revised protection orders stemming from the Act have been used by some women and have helped them escape forced marriages (Ministry of Justice 2009). They have also encouraged better informed debate within the generic VAW sector on an issue that was previously dealt with only by the BAMER sector.

The Forced Marriage Act was followed closely by the raising of the permitted age of entry to Britain of wives joining their husbands, making it ap-

parent that immigration control was part of the reason for the sudden interest in this area. Not surprisingly, many South Asian women were able to see behind this smoke screen of 'concern'. As a woman user of the dwindling specialist services in Rotherham in North East England asked – *'What is the Forced Marriage agenda really about, is it about offering protection or keeping people out of this country?'* (Service User 2010).

Community cohesion

In the summer of 2001, a series of violent confrontations in northern towns led to the worst riots in England since 1981. Racist gangs had long and almost routinely invaded Asian areas attacking men, women and children, and the police themselves had targeted these areas, with the local media long sensationalising Asian crimes against whites and interpreting them as 'racially motivated' (Kundnani 2007: 53, 196). In every case in the 2001 riots, the violence was begun by racist gangs either going on a rampage or attempting to march through Asian areas and the police responding by donning riot gear and invading these areas themselves (Kundnani 2007). The riots in Bradford resulted in injuries to hundreds of police officers and the destruction of many buildings. The press and a variety of commentators argued that the over tolerance inherent in 'diversity' policies had encouraged Muslims to live by their own values, and that the riots were the result of the innate separateness of Islamic culture and that these communities had 'self-segregated' (see for example, Toynbee 2004; Phillips 2005).

Amidst these developments, the government assertions made it clear (Home Office 2002) that the concept of institutional racism, acknowledged in February 1999 (Macpherson 1999), was to be abandoned in favour of integration. Simultaneously, the Human Rights Act (1998) also virtually abandoned the whole question of racism or racial discrimination. The law made it plain that what was of concern in this era, when 'regime change' was carried out in the name of 'human rights', was not 'race' but 'human rights'. The 9/11 attacks provided the state with the ideal launching pad for policies like Community Cohesion. In fact, we argue that 'Community Cohesion', despite its name, can best be understood as an essentially racist framework of policies which stand for assimilation and is based on the politics of fear and the state's concern with national security and immigration.

The notion of community cohesion also provides the state with a 'moral' justification for its neoliberal economic policies of cuts in public expenditure. It urges the closure of certain services and organizations, whose very exis-

tence, it claims, undermines the 'glue' (CLG 2008a) [of Britishness] which holds the nation together. The policies of community cohesion, we argue, rule that funds be withdrawn from specialist BAMER projects or that these organizations be merged with mainstream services. In fact, it tries to erase the concept of specific needs altogether (Worley 2005). Further, despite the fact that UK government statistics indicate that women were the victims in nearly 8 out of 10 incidents of domestic violence (Home Office 2009), state policy has also begun to emphasize that men too face violence. In other words, that it is a question of gender, not women's oppression. Thus the systemic nature of women's oppression has increasingly been sidelined in state policy.

The Supporting People Programme (SP) implemented from April 2003 also paved the way for a series of cuts in the BAMER women's sector. SP claimed to offer *'vulnerable people the opportunity to improve their quality of life by providing a stable environment which enables greater independence'* (CLG 2005) but in reality, it has become a cost cutting exercise which, in the name of 'best value', has done away with a large number of BAMER refuges or merged them with mainstream organisations, drastically reducing such services (Thiara and Hussain 2005). With the increasing use of competitive tendering processes and 'best value' service evaluations, long-established BAMER services are now being routinely asked by their Local Authority to re-apply for funding, deliver their services with less funds while targeting more women from other communities, and in some cases to consider how their services cater for men. Consequently, funding for the women's sector has been re-distributed to make room for a monopoly of state-run services and generic 'super-providers' with a lack of expertise or history in delivering services for women and children.

The struggle against the decimation of this sector has intensified since early 2008, when Imkaan[2] launched a national campaign, publishing a report (Mouj 2008) which highlighted the closure of essential services, and the reduction in safe spaces for women and children as a consequence of the lack of recognition of the needs of BAMER women and children by Local Authorities. Imkaan reported 50% of BAMER women-led services had been taken over by large non-specialist providers, 70% of existing BAMER services for women and children were under threat of being decommissioned under the move towards area-based grants and value for money assessments (Mouj 2008). Since the 1980s, the BAMER sector has been crucially important in saving lives, providing safety to BAMER women facing domestic

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2   Imkaan is a national second tier organisation that provides a strategic voice, research, training for BAMER refuges supporting women and children escaping violence.

violence, countering their total isolation from family and community networks, meeting their linguistic and cultural needs and those of their children and providing a space free from racism and Islamophobia. Yet Local Authorities have shown little recognition of the needs of BAMER women, brushing aside the ways of working which have been fought for and established over a considerable period. Their assessments of best value – on the basis of which refuges are asked to close or merge – ignore the well-established fact that BAMER women and children facing domestic violence need greater advocacy, and often need interpreters and outreach and therapeutic work (Thiara 2005). Despite the government's proclamation about investing in services, this does not appear to address the reality of women's needs particularly in the areas of housing-based support. More than 300 women a day are still unable to access a refuge which equates to 78,000 women per year in the UK (Women's Aid 2009). Shockingly, over 40% of BAMER women have been in the abusive relationship for 5 years or more and over 90% experienced abuse on a weekly basis (Thiara and Roy 2010). These figures speak for themselves, demonstrating that current approaches offer partial solutions to addressing violence, clearly signifying the importance of a holistic approach through early and crisis intervention, counselling, advocacy, advice, outreach and peer-support.

BAMER women's experiences of VAW services in this era of Community Cohesion and SP highlight the deep contradictions between the state's proclamations and the policies it implements. As many in the South Asian women's refuge movement are asking, if the state is concerned about South Asian women's lives being endangered by Forced Marriage and Honour Crimes (singling out South Asian and Middle Eastern women in this respect) why is it closing down the very organisations and services which support and strengthen South Asian women? And these organisations are shockingly few and far between anyway: for instance, Black women facing domestic violence had to contact an average of 17 agencies before finding help (for white women the number is 11) (Brittain et al. 2005). Imkaan's 2008 report also pointed out a key contradiction between these proposals for the future funding and delivery of domestic violence services and the government's own Gender and Race Equality Legislation:

> The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 Section 2(2) holds public authorities to account where they are charged to rebuild trust and demonstrate fairness by eliminating racial discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity and good race relations... The Gender Equality Duty [requires that] public bodies… take pro-active steps to promote equality between women and men [and] take account of the different needs of women and men in policy and service planning rather than react to complaints when things go wrong. (Mouj 2008: 3)

This contradiction led to a remarkable victory for the BAMER women's sector, when Southall Black Sisters, facing cuts in their core funding from Ealing Council, took the Local Authority to court and won. The case established an important precedent which some BAMER refuges may well be able to use to fight back. However, without a shift in government policy and ring-fenced funding for VAW services, local groups will not be in a position to challenge local commissioning decisions.

The criminal justice system and violence against women

Changes in funding have been accompanied by a shift in the nature of work expected of domestic violence services. There is a greater emphasis on punitive action to tackle domestic violence through the CJS than on preventative work. The rhetoric behind this is that those who face violence will have the 'rights' needed to punish the perpetrators by taking them to court. This punitive CJS approach is institutionalized in the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004. The infrastructure consists of MARACS[3], often police-led multi-agency panels which discuss high risk cases of domestic violence with the aim of reducing repeat victimization; Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) often placed within the statutory sector or in large voluntary sector organisations, and Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVCs). Although MARACs do not deal with low or medium risk cases, these comprise the majority of domestic violence cases supported by refuges (Gill and Banga 2008). As may be expected, MARACs have all the drawbacks of crisis management, since of about 1.5 million people who suffer domestic violence a year, they target only around 150,000, (10%) of the most high risk cases in any authority. The rest are expected to be catered for by domestic violence services increasingly under threat of funding cuts.

Since 2005, 127 SDVCs have been established across the UK, providing trained lawyers and judges and 'a more supportive environment' for women to pursue CJS routes. However, research by Imkaan shows that of 37% of women willing to report to the Police, with the support of a BAMER worker, only a fifth (20%) were willing to support a prosecution. The reasons given for not taking any formal action were wanting to access the safety of a BAMER service prior to approaching the Police. Respondents felt too scared of repercussions and did not want to have parents or family arrested (Thiara and Roy 2010). Despite neoliberalism's frequently stated aim of making the

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3   Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) are not strictly within the criminal justice system

individual 'independent', a system based on MARACs, also, inevitably dis-empowers women facing domestic violence. As Nicola Harwin of Women's Aid puts it, MARACS in most areas *'are not survivor-led. The victim is in-formed that a referral is happening. In a sense they are in direct conflict with the principle of empowerment'* (Hansard, 2008). In addition, while based in areas with sizeable BAMER communities, only 8.45% of cases reviewed at MARAC between July 2008-July 2009 involved BAMER women (Howarth et al. 2009). According to a worker in a generic advice centre, this is because these cases are deemed too complex and therefore there is *'an assumption that these so-called 'honour'-based violence cases 'take too long'* (Advice Centre worker 2010). In another interview, a BAMER outreach manager told us:

> We know of a generic organisation working with a South Asian woman who was referred to the MARAC – their support to her involved using an interpreter to call her over the phone 3 or 4 times. In our experience, if women do not feel they can build up a trusting face-to-face relationship with the organisation they will remain isolated for longer and are unlikely to leave the abuse. This is not about language only. (Outreach Manager 2010)

MARACs are not at present statutory provision, and are set up at the discre-tion of each local authority. The Association of Police Officers (ACPO) has proposed that they be made statutory, commenting that they: *'... do not con-sider it acceptable that effective public protection systems should be left to the whims of local agencies to decide upon ... there is a clear requirement that all areas shall have in place MARAC capability by a date to be deter-mined'* (Hansard 2008). While there may be advantages in making MARACs statutory, before this is done their weaknesses need to be addressed if they are going to be useful, particularly for BAMER women.

There is also a further move towards criminalisation which is discussed in the ACPO document – this time of women facing domestic violence being prosecuted if they decide to withdraw their cases. In fact, the state had made provision for this in earlier legislation. In a Kafkaesque allocation of neolib-eral 'responsibilities' accompanying neoliberal 'rights', the right to safety has been accompanied by a responsibility to take the perpetrator to court (ACPO 2009). Clearly, women, and particularly BAMER women can be pressurised into withdrawing support for a prosecution but an entirely legal-istic approach will make it harder for them to speak out at all against vio-lence. As the Director of Imkaan states:

> Imkaan will support any initiative that will make a difference to vulnerable women and children. However, the government's excessive focus on criminal justice out-comes and its isolationist approach to Violence Against Women policy is prob-lematic – each new development somehow being the solution rather than another

potential building block. In practice, this creates an 'either/or' context which limits women's routes into safety, support and empowerment (2010).

Increasingly, a picture is emerging of a system, we argue, which ties in with the security agenda and is focused mainly on pursuing and punishing perpetrators, as reflected in ACPO's recent response to a Home Office consultation, *Together we can end violence against women and girls*, which reinforced a 'perpetrator focus' (ACPO 2009). Would it not be more helpful if the police could also explore ways in which they can become more accessible to a larger number of women, since, according to the Home Office statistics, only 13% of women who told someone they were facing domestic violence approached the police (Povey et al. 2008).

Currently Sanctuary Schemes are being promoted as one of the key ways of addressing violence. At its basic level, the former provides women in danger with a secure room in the house to flee to. However, without an adequate risk assessment and links to support services women could feel isolated and essentially become prisoners in one room. In addition, the Government has invested £15 million in Family Intervention Projects (FIPs): (Home Office), which seek to address a wide variety of issues, including domestic violence. Apart from the underlying authoritarian approach here which blames families and parents for failing to cope with the disintegrating welfare state and the encroachment of market values into all areas of life, these programmes are, as one FIP worker told us:

> … problematic because it places untrained workers in highly complex and often dangerous situations. In one ongoing case in a family where the woman has been subject to a violent assault during pregnancy, despite interventions from the police and social services the woman remains in the home and I am then expected to work with the family to resolve a highly complex situation placing both the woman and worker at risk. (FIP worker 2010)

Under the Government's new policies, women are ultimately presented with fewer choices. Without the ability to secure a place of safety and emotional and peer support within a refuge setting, they are increasingly expected to manage their risk and rebuild their lives on their own. In addition, the ways in which cases are handled day to day suggests that the culture of surveillance and fear created by the 'War on Terror' has become deeply ingrained in VAW work in BAMER communities. A worker at a mainstream West London women's centre commented, for example:

> The only training on offer on issues affecting BME women is led by the community safety officer who is based at the local police station and whose whole focus with reference to forced marriages and honour killings is not on what rights and resources the woman can access but on profiling the perpetrators (Bubblie Kang 2008).

Given the climate of racism and the intensifying surveillance which is a part of the 'War on Terror', this profiling will inevitably target Muslim communities. While the state is profiling whole communities in the name of the 'War on Terror', in the name of the 'right' to live free of violence it is profiling perpetrators who we are increasingly told come from the same communities of 'organised criminals'. For example, Nazir Afzal, a Director of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), speaks enthusiastically of 'hotspots' of radicalism and honour-based violence. In a speech given at Imkaan's round-table discussion, 'Responding to violence against women in the name of '*honour'* on 22 November 2006, he stated:

> The Forced Marriage Unit have a lovely map on their wall and it basically identi-fies where most of their referrals are from and, if you went in the Special Branch of the Terrorist Unit and looked at their map, you would see significant links, sig-nificant correlation… There was one case where I could actually evidence it, so how many others are there . . . I have been talking to ministers for the last few months. I mentioned radicalism hotspots and the map of honour-based violence hotspots – then they really listened!

While it may be assumed from Mr. Afzal's track record that this statement would not have been intended to reinforce negative perceptions of Britain's Muslim communities, nevertheless making this link is problematic. It presents a position which is at best over-simplified and at worst potentially dangerous.

The anti-terrorism agenda and violence against women

The deprioritisation of VAW is once again demonstrated by the National Indicators set by the government to shape the funds allocated to local authorities. Only one National Indicator out of 198 is related to domestic violence and it concerns 'repeat violence' by perpetrators. However, there is a new indicator about Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE)[4] and engaging with PVE has also become a statutory duty. It is expected that by April 2011, the budget for PVE will increase by a further £100million (Kundnani 2009).There can be no doubt that the anti-terrorism agenda, along with the sensational and often inaccurate media coverage, constantly escalates racism and Islamophobia. Even Police statistics show that the numbers of faith and race/hate

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4   The PVE agenda is a part of PREVENT which is one of the four 'workstreams of 'CONTEST' part of the government's wider counter terrorism strategy (HM Government, 2009).

crimes have risen from 261 incidents in 2002–03 (Parry, Chowdhury and Tucker 2003) to 9,946 in 2009 (MPS 2009).

In Rotherham, a northern English town, for the Muslim community intimidation and violence are everyday experiences. During confidential interviews (2010, 13 January), women told us: 'People are scared living in Rotherham. We are wondering and anxious about what might happen next to the Muslim community': *I was walking out one day – when a car full of English men who were wearing suits in a very nice car started swearing, shouting abusive words in English and some in broken Punjabi*' (Service User 2010). In addition, it has led to profound changes in the welfare framework (which directly affect BAMER women facing domestic violence) because it draws statutory bodies into:

> … the 'securitisation' agenda thereby dismantling the traditional relationships of trust and confidence between public bodies and service users…. And the community cohesion policies which are an integral part of it have led to 'the abandonment of funding for traditional community development, capacity building and empowerment work with BME communities (Lacman 2009).

Given these changes, it is hardly surprising that VAW has risen in the period 2009–2010 (MPA 2010). We are not arguing that PVE programmes have been used to divert money away from women's groups to religious groups but that they have created a group of Muslim spokespersons who acquiese with government policies on the 'War on Terror'. If community cohesion has led to the closure of organisations, the PVE strategy has set up new ones of a very different kind – working, it is claimed, with 'Muslim community leaders, youth and women'. In 2007, the CLG 'Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund' (PVEPF) was established. This has led to the setting up and funding of local Muslim organisations, a part of whose role, in the words of the CLG, will be to empower Muslim women by giving them 'a stronger voice, increased confidence and the knowledge to challenge and tackle violent extremism' (CLG 2008b).

In Ealing, for example, two Muslim women's groups were being set up while Southall Black Sisters faced cuts. When Southall Black Sisters questioned this they were told by Ealing Council that these Muslim women's organisations were in a different funding stream under which they must 'link to the overarching objective of creating a situation where Muslim communities reject and actively condemn violent extremism and seek to undermine and isolate violent extremists. A condition of the grant is that it is not used for the furtherance or propagation of a faith' (Ealing Council 2008). Thus, it would appear that in the new state and media discourses, the measure of Muslim women's 'empowerment' is not whether they are able to confront or escape

domestic violence but whether they can be involved as the state's allies in the surveillance which is central to the 'War on Terror' (Da Costa and Dubey 2008). In April 2008, the CLG launched the 'Community Leadership Fund' (CLF) aiming to 'support work that will build the capacity of individuals, organisations and communities to take the lead on tackling violent extremist influences' (CLG 2008: 3). The CLF prioritises five areas of voluntary work, including 'Supporting Muslim women'. What does CLF mean in reality? A Manager from Rotherham told us that CLF had not led to improvements in all services for local women and communities, while a community worker from Leeds said *'Its not about women at all but about supporting those who do not criticise government policies'.*

Clearly, this points to the problematic way in which Community Cohesion has been used, together with the Prevent agenda, to demonise whole communities, including women facing violence, while the same local authority questions the existence of a BAMER women's service. In Bradford, a largely Muslim working-class town in the North of England, home to a population which has been reduced to poverty by deindustrialisation and now neoliberal policies, local authorities have received £1,425,000 in one year alone (Kundnani 2009). How has this affected the situation of women whom PVE wishes to 'empower'? For a start, few women's organisations have even been informed of this funding, let alone drawn into its programmes. A project in Bradford providing the only service for single young women dealing with many cases of forced marriage among other related problems, has been told nothing about the Prevent strategy or funding. A refuge manager told us:

> We were recently reviewed and felt that the Local Authority had no overall interest in the outcomes of the service. Since then I have learnt that the Local Authority has set up its own service for homeless women including those fleeing violence – it is well resourced and they control all referrals and as a consequence we have seen a major drop in referrals from the Council.

Workers at the project say they know that women have actively chosen their services but now both they and the local generic Women's Aid are likely to be told that there is no demand for their services and hence penalised. In Nottingham, the Council was allocated £965,000 in pathfinder funds as part of the East Midlands region encompassing Derby, Leicester and Nottingham (Hansard 2009) in PVE money between 2007 and 2009, as well as funding under the strand of community cohesion. The Manager of the only BAMER women's refuge in the area told us:

> I have heard nothing at all about the Prevent Agenda or funding – but am aware that at one time the Council were offering pots of money for Muslim specific voluntary sector services, which we could not apply for because we are not Muslim

only although 90% of the women we support are from the Muslim, Pakistani community! (Refuge Manager 2010)

This service is facing closure, despite various representations from its service users stating that they need, want and value a South Asian service. What is particularly significant is that this service deals with many forced marriage and so-called honour based violence cases, and despite the government's much publicised concern for women, it has no hesitation in ruthlessly causing its closure.

Conclusion

At a time when a rights-based agenda is said to be a primary aim, BAMER women are losing their rights to the welfare services which serve their needs best. Places and routes of safety are being closed down while immigration imperatives and the security agenda are completely eroding the relationships of trust which have been traditional in the welfare sector. On an everyday level, the politics of suspicion and fear, the rise of far-right groups and escalating racism and Islamophobia are creating an atmosphere of intense intimidation. The underlying rationale is clear enough – vulnerable people are costing the state too much and they will be increasingly abandoned as Britain moves towards American-style welfare provision. The ideological message is that the withdrawal of the state from all responsibility is actually empowering for the individual, even if their survival is threatened.

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