

Title: ‘Your name does not tick the box’: The intertwining of names, bodies, religion and nationality in the construction of identity within the UK asylum system

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Abstract

This article draws on research with Pakistani Christians seeking asylum in the UK, focusing on those with English/biblical names, exploring, firstly the relationship between names and religious persecution in the country of origin, and secondly the complex interaction between names, bodies, religion and nationality within the UK asylum system. It argues that in responding to the perceived threats of immigration and terrorism, British immigration officials tend to use Pakistani as a proxy for Islam, with those Christians who possess English/biblical names often perceived to be a more suspicious group. It concludes by highlighting the need to take religious identities seriously in immigration policies and practices, especially in the context of the current refugee crisis.

Keywords

Pakistani Christians, asylum seekers, religious persecution, names, bodies, nationality

Anxiety over immigration and asylum, together with questions of security and social cohesion, are among the key issues dominating the political agendas of western governments in the 21st century. Particularly predominant are concerns about securing borders, especially in the aftermath of the September 11 bombings in America and addressing the vulnerability of contemporary immigration regimes to unwanted migrants (often presumed to be terrorists) in relation to the current complex migration-asylum flows (Castles et al 2013). Noting the ways in which these concerns have been interwoven, conflated and entangled, Givens et al (2009) argue that because the September 11 hijackers officially entered the United States through the normal immigration checkpoints without being detected, this provides evidence of the failure of, and vulnerability in, immigration regimes. Subsequently, immigration has become a “higher-priority item” on the political and public agenda as well as being inevitably “linked to possibilities of terrorist attacks”, thereby precipitating the merger of immigration and terrorism policies (Givens et al 2009, 1). Also, given that the 9/11 terrorists were migrants and all identified as Muslims, terrorism has inevitably come to be perceived as a Muslim phenomenon which diffuses via migration and asylum flows (Tumlin 2004; Bove and Böhmelt 2016).

However, questions can be raised as to how this immigration–terrorism nexus might be shaping immigration and asylum processes as well as complicating migrants and asylum seekers’ rights to fair treatment. Writing in the context of the United States, Tumlin (2004) argues that the popular view of terrorists as Muslims has led to ‘an immigration-plus profiling regime’, which targets immigrants of particular national origins and presumed Muslim religious identity for heightened scrutiny. Elaborating on this, Shamir (2005, 199) coins the phrase “collective categories of suspicion”, arguing that particular nationalities are blacklisted as “universally dangerous persons”. However, the question remains; how are individuals identified and categorised within predetermined identity boxes? While there is a scarcity of research evidence in this area, Ahmed (2007) provides some useful insights. In her article

‘Phenomenology of Whiteness’ Ahmed reflects on her own personal encounter with immigration officials at the borders of New York City, as a British national of a Muslim heritage. Her experience suggests that, within the immigration control systems, ‘names’ and ‘bodies’ are also central to the identification of migrants who are assumed to be Muslims, and hence potential terrorists. Ahmed (2007, 162 emphasis added) recalls:

I arrive in New York, clutching my British passport. I hand it over. He [*immigration official*] looks at me, and then looks at my passport. I know what questions will follow. ‘Where are you from?’ My passport indicates my place of birth. ‘Britain’, I say... He looks down at my passport, not at me. ‘Where is your father from?’ It was the same last time I arrived in New York. It is the question I get asked now, which seems to locate what is suspect *is not* [*only*] my body, but [*also*] that which has been passed down the family line, almost like a bad inheritance. ... The name ‘Ahmed’, a Muslim name, slows me down. It blocks my passage, even if only temporarily.

As argued by Darling (2011), border security measures draw together concerns with surveillance, identity and difference, into a series of diffuse practices of immigration control. However, largely missing are asylum seekers’ experiences. As Jubany (2011, 75) argues, despite a relatively long history of sociology of migration research, that provides evidence “on the control and management of refugee flows in the social, legal and economic context, there has been surprisingly little research-based discussion of ...the asylum screening process and many questions remain unanswered”. Such questions include:

Are policy-makers and academics aware of or concerned about this complex decision-making process? Do they know how asylum seekers are ‘selected’ on arrival, whose criteria are applied and how these influence the outcomes? Is the legal framework the base for asylum screening decisions, or is it the social, cultural and political context that shapes them? (Jubany 2011, 75)

Indeed, of interest in this article are experiences of Christians from Muslim majority countries, particularly Pakistani Christians with English/biblical names, fleeing religiously-motivated persecution to the UK. The article seeks to answer the following questions: How do particular names contribute to religious discrimination and persecution in the Pakistani context? And, how do names, bodies, religion and nationality intertwine in the UK asylum process?

Consequently, this article represents a perspective that has received scant attention in the existing body of migration literature. The article is organised as follows. Section one examines the literature on the role of names and bodies in the construction of identity. Section two provides the theoretical and contextual background with a brief analysis of the UK asylum system and the ways in which categories are created in the management of asylum claims. Section three describes the research with 8 Pakistani Christian asylum seekers with English/biblical names upon which this article is based. Data from this research are then analyzed in relation to the above two questions.

The role of names and bodies in the construction of identity

The role of names in the social construction of identity has been the subject of recent scholarly inquiry (e.g. Alia 2007; Finch 2008; Rom and Benjamin 2011; Khosravi 2012; Pilcher 2016; Wykes 2015). These works reveal that everyday human interaction involves processes of interpretation whereby actors often use a complex range of identifications to make judgments

about social identity. It has been suggested that along with surnames, personal names, are often used as core markers in the construction of an individual's personal, ethnic and national identity. For example, Finch (2008, 709) argues that:

My name...marks me as a unique individual, and it also gives some indication of my location in the various social worlds which I inhabit – it encapsulates my legal persona as a British citizen, it reveals my gender and probably my ethnicity...

Writing in the context of the Inuit culture, Alia (2007) argues that, as well as their power to symbolise personal and social identity, names have 'politics' and can either facilitate or complicate individual or group relationships, access to work and/or even the ability to integrate into a society. Highlighting the ways in which names are often mobilised to construct boundaries of belonging, to demarcate who is an insider and who is an outsider, Alia argues that names are not simply a tag or label but an important site at which to analyse issues of power relations and notions of discrimination.

In the existing literature, the significance of names as a marker of identity has gained currency in the context of racial discrimination. For example, Wood et al (2009) suggest that, in the UK labour market, names can disadvantage individuals of particular racial and ethnic backgrounds. They argue that their participants with typically African and Asian names were less likely to secure an interview after submitting their CV than those with stereotypically white British names. The power of names to racially stereotype and stigmatise individuals was highlighted in a recently publicised case where a district judge was accused of making problematic assumptions about a harassment victim's employment, based on her surname. The *Guardian* quoted the judge as saying "with a name like Patel, and her ethnic background, she won't be working anywhere important where she can't get the time off" (Bunyan 2014). Such views confirm Rom and Benjamin's (2011, 8) argument that:

Whenever we hear a name, we unconsciously place the person, who owns it, in relation to local social hierarchies, assigning him/her a position between the center and the margins. In this process, the name serves as a basis for the evaluation of what is normative and prestigious, or else awkward and stigmatized.

Wykes (2015) has shown the impact that processes of name racialisation may have upon multi-racial parents' naming choices in the UK. She argues that, when deciding on children's forenames and surnames, multi-racial parents often found themselves confronted with "juxtaposing concerns: a fear of potential discrimination faced by children on the basis of them bearing a 'foreign' name, and a desire to reflect the children's multiracial and/or ethnic heritage" (Wykes 2015, 1).

However, Pilcher (2016) draws attention to the embodied nature of identity, arguing that accounts of the relationship between names and identity have largely overlooked the body. She argues:

The uniqueness of my identity, my individuality, arises...from the coincidence of my forename-plus-surname as a label applied to *my face and body* as the visible, tangible and distinctive surfaces of *myself*... Identities arise out of the complex meshing of the connections between names, bodies and identity that I subsequently refer to as the 'names-bodies-identity nexus' (Pilcher 2016, 771).

Within the context of this "names-bodies-identity nexus" thesis, Pilcher notes the important role that identity documents such as passports play in the authentication of individuals'

identities “through the verified matching of names with bodily appearance” (Pilcher 2016, 771). With an expectation for names to be intrinsically tied to particular ethnic bodies, Pilcher (2016, 776) argues that “a dissonance might be experienced if names are ‘seen’ not to match ethnic or racialized bodily appearance”. The question is, if names are expected to match particular ethnic bodies, to what extent might individuals from the same ethnic background be perceived as sharing the same characteristics and practices?

Extending her “names-bodies-identity nexus” thesis, Pilcher introduces the concept of “embodied named identity”, which she argues, is critical to addressing ‘the neglect of the body within the sociology of names and the neglect of naming within both the sociology of identity and in the sociology of the body’ (2016, 778). She provides numerous examples in relation to sexed and gendered bodies, racialized and ethnic bodies, nameless bodies and body-less names. Reflecting on Sarah Ahmed’s (2007) encounter with immigration officials, mentioned earlier, Pilcher invokes Connell’s (2009) notion of “contradictory embodiment”, arguing that despite Ahmed’s possession of the ‘right’ (in this case British) passport, her ‘wrong’ (in this context Muslim sounding) name, together with her (Muslim) bodily appearance, marked her out as potentially dangerous, hence out of place. Pilcher concludes:

In other words, that key artefacts of identification, even the passport, can be undermined by a perceived dissonance or ‘contradiction’ between the bodies we see and the names and nationalities stereotypically or prejudicially attached to them reveals the intertwining of the names–body–identity nexus (Pilcher 2016, 779).

While insightful, Pilcher’s theorisation could be extended, given that “individuals’ identities are never produced along one axis of difference” (Valentine and Sporton 2009, 736). Arguably, other than ethnicity, identity is formed at extremely complex levels and across other axes of distinctiveness including religion, with the Ahmed example suggesting a scenario in which both ethnicity and religion are key elements at play. As Grim and Finke (2007, 639) argue, a common assumption is that “ethnicity taps into the most significant differences”, with scholars “typically conflating ethnicity and religion...” and yet “while religion and ethnicity do overlap, they are not identical”. Consequently there is a need to examine and understand identities within the socio-political contexts in which they are formulated and populated. Arguably, the Ahmed example can be better understood considering the current socio-political atmosphere in liberal democratic states, where Muslims have come to be widely perceived as particularly problematic.

Indeed, as Khattab and Johnson (2015, 502) argue, across the world, Muslims have been put in the spotlight, “to the extent that it is difficult to separate the impact of practicing Islam, appearing Muslim, or simply being a Muslim by birth, family, or community”. With reference to names, Khosravi (2012, 65) argues that Muslim sounding names have ceased to be a mere marker of the Muslim identity and become a symbol of the ‘danger’ that the Islamic religion represents. Khosravi suggests that the entrenched anti-Muslim prejudice in Swedish communities is compelling some Muslims to change their names to more Swedish or European sounding names, as a way of ‘unmarking’ themselves as Muslim. Nevertheless, Khosravi’s analysis suggests a perceived ‘mismatch’ between individuals’ bodies and their newly acquired names, resulting in some Muslims continuing to be treated with suspicion despite their name change. This supports Valentine and Sporton’s (2009, 736) argument that “a given identity is not just something that can be claimed by an individual, however; it is also dependent, at least in part, on an individual’s identity being recognized or accepted by a wider community of practice”.

However, little is known about the experience of Christians from Muslim majority countries, especially in relation to asylum, particularly whether, despite their bodily

appearance, they are perceived to have a different identity. In this article, I focus on Pakistani Christians with English/biblical names, exploring the complex interaction between, names, bodies, religion and nationality - what I will refer to as the “names-bodies-religion-nationality” nexus, as an extension of Pilcher’s (2016) thesis.

In the following section I discuss the securitization of asylum in the UK, and the creation of neat categories in the management of claims.

The securitization of asylum in the UK and the construction of social categories

Concerns about asylum in the UK started to appear in the early 1990s, leading to an overhaul of the asylum system under the New Labour government’s term in office (1997-2010) with stringent policy measures underpinned by the principle of deterrence (Cwerner 2004). The rationale was the need to both improve administrative efficiency (in the context of asylum delays) and tackle abuse of the asylum system (concerning the increase in numbers of asylum-seekers in the UK).

However, the policy implications with the emphasis on speed (Cwerner 2004) have been criticised for their perpetuation of modes of racial discrimination (e.g Sales 2002; Jubany 2011). A major concern are mechanisms for categorising people to make the asylum process easier to manage and faster in removing individuals. For example, Jubany’s (2011, 82) ethnographic research exposes immigration officials’ tendency to designate individuals into normative categories and patterns: “reducing the odds of individual circumstances being taken into account”. Also the designation of certain countries as ‘safe’ and others deemed to pose a risk to the UK (Cwerner 2004). According to Jubany (2011), this promotes stereotypical views and concealment of discriminatory practices towards particular nationalities, which work to shape assumptions about truth.

The stark contradiction between asylum and racial equality policies has been noted by Sales (2002, 57) who argues that “the government has extended anti-discrimination legislation into the public sector, but excluded those who make decisions on immigration allowing them to make blanket decisions on the basis of country of origin” Thus Darling (2011, 267) emphasises the need to consider the implications of asylum policies for people who are “caught within modes of sorting and categorisation”.

Along with other liberal democracies, the securitization of asylum seekers in the UK intensified in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, thereby conflating asylum and terrorism in both public debates and policy. The provisions of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 included the “speeding up of the asylum process for suspected terrorists, excluding substantive consideration of asylum claims where the Secretary of State certifies that their removal would be conducive to the public good” (Sales 2005, 448). Thus, by legally categorising asylum seekers as a high-risk group, the government not only undermined asylum seekers’ rights to fair treatment, but also generated a public “moral panic” (Cohen 2002) leading to a growing suspicion toward the entire asylum population. Jubany (2011) highlights the social construction of truth within the asylum adjudication process, arguing that immigration officers often work with a set of established criteria, which help them decide whether to refuse or grant refugee status. Consequently, it is likely that in defining and categorising those asylum seekers who fit the image of a terrorist, “visible difference, ethnicity, religious belief and *names* may all be used” (Lynn and Lea 2003, 428 emphasis added).

With the increased depiction of asylum seekers as “a risky group that needs to be prevented, contained and, preferably, repatriated” (Malloch and Stanley 2005:54), speeding up

the asylum process has continued to be the major focus of asylum legislation. In 2007, the New Asylum Model (NAM) introduced a single Case Owner model, giving a Home Office official responsibility for a case from its application stage to its conclusion (either granting of status or removal). The NAM also introduced a “series of ‘case types’ or ‘categories’ into which the diverse claims of those seeking asylum can be classified” (Darling 2011, 266) influencing decisions around welfare entitlements, detention and deportation.

While the UK Border Agency has been criticised about the quality of decision-making in NAM cases (UNHCR 2007), questions remain as to how asylum cases are allocated. For example, are cases involving particular nationalities deliberately allocated to caseworkers of a similar heritage, as a strategy to enable quicker decisions? Also, with a drive to “deliver faster outcomes” (Home 2006) to what extent does the conflation of asylum seekers and terrorists increase the likelihood for some officials to make decisions and draw conclusions based on claimants’ visible identities?

Overall, in their dealings with asylum seekers, border control officials often begin from an assumption that asylum seekers are not telling the truth, creating both an endemic image of asylum seekers as ‘bogus’ and ‘cheats’ and a ‘culture of disbelief’, operating within a broader institutional ‘culture of denial’ (Souter 2011). As I argue below, when the practices and priorities of an immigration regime seem targeted towards the identification of fraudulent claims, the ability of individuals to present and defend their claims and attain refugee status is impeded.

Methods and the study

This article is based on ethnographic research (conducted between June and December 2015) with 40 research participants through interviews, focus groups, informal conversations and individual case reviews. The sample includes 15 Pakistani Christians (5 refugees and 10 asylum seekers - 5 females and 10 males), with the other 25 participants consisting of individuals from migrant support organisations and churches, Pakistani Christian community leaders and professionals such as legal advisors, immigration judges and those who train interpreters. Interviews were conducted in both English and Urdu, using an interpreter. Snowball sampling and existing contacts with migrant support organisations and churches facilitated research access. Research encounters were audio recorded and transcribed before analysis using thematic and conversational techniques. Thus the themes were developed through the process of coding and analysing data, rather than being theory driven (Charmaz 2006). The research aimed to gain an understanding of the Pakistani Christians’ experiences, both as victims of religious persecution while still in Pakistan and as asylum claimants, seeking protection on religious grounds in the UK. While the study has generated rich data, the findings cannot be taken to be representative of the experience of all Pakistani Christian asylum seekers or all Christians from Muslim majority countries. As argued elsewhere (Madziva and Lowndes forthcoming) the intention of this study was to document the experience of the particular individuals we engaged with and draw ‘analytical generalizations’ (Yin 2003) that could then form the basis of research with a wider sample.

In light of the vulnerable nature of the population under study, key ethical issues including confidentiality, informed consent and avoiding harm were given high priority, as was the need to avoid unnecessary discomfort (see Madziva 2015). During fieldwork, efforts were made to ensure that participants understood how data would be recorded, stored, analysed and disseminated. This article focuses on the experience of 8 participants (4 males and 4 females)

with English/biblical names. All names used in the article are pseudonyms to protect participants' identities.

Religious persecution and the role of names in the Pakistani context

Although the establishment of the independent state of Pakistan in 1947 was accompanied by a proclaimed tolerance for all religions, the country has since then significantly evolved towards becoming a formalised Islamic state (Hassan 2002). Moreover, in recent years, Pakistan has come to be known for widespread discrimination against religious minorities such as Christians, Hindus and Ahmadi Muslims (BPCA 2013). Fernandes (2016) argues that Christians in Pakistan are not simply a minority within the Muslim majority but the target of religiously motivated discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping and violence. The issues are exacerbated by the country's draconian blasphemy laws that punish people with life imprisonment, or even death, for any kind of action or behaviour that could be interpreted as either defamatory to Islam's Holy Prophet Muhammad or offensive to the religious feelings of Muslims (Fernandes 2016). Participants in this study noted how the infamous blasphemy laws not only serve to reinforce ideologies of religious hierarchy, but are also a tool for curtailing religious minorities' rights to freedom of expression and religion as well as constituting grounds for their persecution. This involves the Christian community constantly facing persecution from religious extremists and hardliners who frequently use blasphemy laws as a cover to settle personal scores.

In this uneven religious landscape, Pakistani Christians form a particular 'community of practice' (Wagner 1999) with shared experiences that reinforce their distinctive identity in a Muslim majority society. As Rom and Benjamin (2011, 47) argue "to the extent that a community of practice can become, or can be seen as, a metaphorical home, a home built together with others with whom values are shared...it is going to have a powerful hold on individuals' identities and practices". In this context, religious difference is an important organizing aspect of the Pakistani Christian community's social practices in the midst of perverse social inequalities and religious antagonism. Thus it should not come as a surprise when Pakistani Christians emphasise their Christian identity or prioritize their faith above their ethno-national identity, especially in their narratives of the self. Participants routinely referred to the significance of names in providing and preserving personal and family identity and their Christian heritage, as well as transmitting these from generation to generation. Writing on the significance of names (in the Israeli context), Rom and Benjamin (2011, 29) argue that:

Naming practices are of a specific type of choices reflecting two contradictory routes of social being. One route is sometimes called "resistance" while the other is sometimes called "accommodation". The first reflects the struggle to experience oneself as becoming a liberated subject...

The findings of this study support Rom and Benjamin's resistance thesis, as it is common practice within the Pakistani Christian community for parents to give their children English or biblical names (a legacy of colonialism and missionary influence), as a way of defining and affirming their Christian identity and distinguishing themselves from the Muslim majority. However, for this group, narratives of 'resistance' were told against the backdrop of a hostile socio-political and religious landscape in which names have become a signifier/marker of faith difference. As one male refugee, Stephen, explains:

My parents believed that Christians must testify about Jesus against all odds, and this includes having a Christian name. So this is a religious background but...people didn't

realize that giving your child a Christian name was like placing a limit on how far that child could go. ...with my name I have experienced serious problems.

Although naming is taken to be a private practice (Edwards and Caballero 2008), it assumes a public significance as it represents a complete departure from the naming practices of the Muslim majority. While Pakistani Christians generally face exceptional barriers to inclusion in mainstream social and economic processes, especially in the labour market, Christians bearing stereotypically biblical/English names, seemed to be much more susceptible to overt discrimination than those with generic Muslim names. Simon-Peter's narrative, below reveals frustrated hopes and lost dreams:

I have got media qualifications, and whenever I went for an interview for jobs and public posts... my name caused lots of problems for me. So if I say it, I could tell there would be a very big change in people's eyes... with, their body language conveying to me that they are only doing a formality... This is one example of discrimination I have suffered myself...

Equally, English/biblical names were also noted to be a key aspect of differentiation and identification in the context of persecution as they not only make those who bear them more easily recognisable as 'Christian' but they also position their bearers as second-class citizens who cannot exercise or enjoy certain rights and privileges. Daniel's narrative below illustrates this:

As a lawyer I used to represent Christians in court... Though I am a Pakistani citizen, because of my being a Christian as made visible by my name and the nature of my work, Muslims saw me as... foreigner who was fighting the Islamic system ... I was taken to be a blasphemer...

Just as Wykes (2015) notes the negative impact of name racialisation upon multi-racial parents' naming choices in the UK, increased awareness of the challenges that Christian names attract is forcing Pakistani Christian families to reconsider their naming practices, seemingly in line with what Rom and Benjamin (2011) describe as the route of 'accommodation'. As Gideon, a male refugee explains:

...It's only after 1980s that the problem of names started to be serious... Christians have now started to give their children Muslim names to disguise their Christian identity. ...but this is a hard decision for many parents as it also means denying their own Christian heritage...

In the context of this intolerance and 'hatred' of the 'other' (Fernandes 2016), those who escaped did so with the hope of finding a safe haven in the supposedly 'Christian' environment of the UK, where they anticipated that their Christian identity would be accepted and valued by others.

The names-bodies-religion-nationality nexus and the UK asylum process *Pakistani Christians' initial encounters with immigration officials*

Existing evidence reveals that the UK is among the top destinations for Pakistani asylum seekers (UNHCR 2014), with recent statistics (Home Office 2016) showing that Pakistani nationals formed the second largest group in relation to all asylum claims that were registered in the UK in the year ending June 2016. However, statistics suggest that the success rate for this group has been very low with just 83 of the 700 claims made in the third quarter of 2016 being granted refugee status (Home Office 2016). This is perhaps unsurprising given that the Home Office's initial decision-making has long been observed to be of a poor quality (Amnesty International 2004). A major cause for concern in the Pakistani Christian context is that asylum statistics tend to present Pakistani asylum seekers as a homogenized ethnic group, which in turn may lead to (mistaken) assumptions that ethnic group members share the same traits and practices. Indeed, these statistics do not denote these asylum seekers' respective religious identities.

When seeking asylum, the initial stage is a screening interview to allow immigration officials to collect claimants' personal information and establish their identities (see Gibb & Good 2014 for a detailed discussion). While, more generally, asylum seekers are frequently received with suspicion as bogus and/or cheats, the Pakistani Christians' experience seems to have been further shaped by a putative Islamophobia; suggesting a conflation of asylum and terrorism. In their reflections of the initial encounters with officials, participants reported a general tendency by the British immigration officials to use Pakistani as a proxy for Islam, with many suggesting that, because of their bodily appearance, they were initially taken to be Muslim. In the context of this social construction of 'truth' (Jubany 2011), bodies were noted to play a highly visible and significant role in blurring religious boundaries and nullifying the distinctiveness of the participants' Christian identity.

Moreover, those who possessed English names – names that were seen (according to officials' classification) not to be representative of their ethnic background (especially when judged in relation to their bodies, ascribed religion and place of origin) reported that British immigration officials not only inevitably raised concerns that their names were not 'ticking the box', but were also sometimes very hostile towards them, treating them as suspects. In this context (just like in Ahmed's [2007] case) having the 'right' (Pakistani) passport or documentation while possessing the 'wrong' (English/biblical sounding) name saw documents being initially perceived as fake, while the presumed religious identity was given precedence. As participants recall:

When we arrived we thought we won't have any problems because our names said it all; that we are born Christians, they are English names. When we handed the documents, these names again made them more suspicious. They doubted our identity as a Pakistani family. ...the problem is faith is not easy to evidence because it doesn't show on the outside... You can say I am a Christian but as long as your body is still looking Asian, they do not believe you straightaway...(Hannah, female refugee)

The official looked at my body and then at my documents...and he said 'your name does not tick the box...'. I told him that I was a Christian... but he said to me 'you can't be a Christian because you are a Muslim, why have you changed your name?' (Gideon, male refugee)

The narratives above not only demonstrate how hard it can be for an asylum seeker to construct 'truths in a culture of disbelief' (Jubany 2011), but also starkly illustrate how, under the intense scrutiny of the border control authorities, the focus may shift to physical

appearance with the body becoming the marker of ‘truth’. Discussing how names are often used to naturalise ideologies of identity, Bentham (cited in Alia 2008, 10) argues that:

...wherever a man sees a NAME he is led to figure to himself a corresponding object, of the reality of which the NAME is accepted by him... From this delusion, endless is the confusion, the error, the dissension, the hostility that has been derived.

Indeed when taken together, the two excerpts above convey the idea of the Christian name being used deliberately to mislead or obscure Muslim identity, exposing how immigration officers’ criteria for categorising individuals and understandings about ‘truth’ often derive from their own assumptions, ambiguous stereotypes and prejudices (Jubany 2011). Consequently, the person seeking asylum is considered suspect in three ways: as an asylum seeker, as someone from Pakistan, and as someone using a ‘suspicious’ name to disguise their identity. In this way, the ‘evidence’ of the Christian name is used against the asylum seeker looking to establish asylum on religious grounds.

Meanwhile the notion of the perceived ‘dissonance’ (Pilcher 2016) between names and bodily appearance as something that legitimises established prejudices was also emphasized by some key informants. Drawing attention to the historical context, one legal advisor, Luisa, said:

In Pakistan there are churches going back to the time of Saint Thomas. ...so it’s because those people changed their names when they became Christians, which is a good biblical tradition. I mean Saul changed his name. ... So that’s just... prejudice and of course being too concerned about security issues... Just because the vast majority of Muslim men, certainly in Pakistan, have Muhammad as one of their names, and that’s probably how immigration officials can tell; they expect you to be known as Muhammad. When you’re not...they get suspicious...

While this suggests that both the body and the name often convey meaning more powerfully, if not convincingly, than verbal communication, the Pakistani Christian case also supports Alcoff’s (2005, 14) argument that such constructions of identity “pose dangers and commit one to mistaken assumptions when they are believed to be real and/or are acted upon politically”.

The complexity imposed by names and bodies in the adjudication of faith-based claims

After overcoming the initial screening interview, claimants are required to undergo a substantive asylum interview with an immigration caseworker (For a detailed discussion see Gibb and Good 2014). With regards to the refugee status determination process, academics have, among other things, noted how torture victims often find it unbearable to narrate their stories of persecution, not least because the “physical pain of torture does not simply resist language but actively destroys it” (Sigona 2014, 374). However, little attention has been paid to assumptions of identity and how this may lead in some cases to some asylum seekers’ voices being silenced.

In this study, Pakistani Christians reported that their asylum cases were mostly handled by immigration officials who they perceived to be individuals of a Pakistani Muslim heritage. This could be an effort by the Home Office to allocate cases involving Pakistani Christians to caseworkers of a Pakistan heritage, presumably with an assumption of cultural understanding and possibly as a strategy to speed up the refugee determination process. Also, three-quarters of the cases in this study involved interpreters, and as participants noted, these were mainly

individuals from a Pakistani Muslim background. However, it is important to point out here that, in the context of the UK's multicultural society, it may not be obvious to tell who is a Pakistani Muslim as these interlocutors could also be British citizens of a Muslim heritage.

However, given the Christian asylum seekers' own negative experiences of a multicultural/faith society in their country of origin, it is notable that narratives of encounters with immigration interlocutors were also produced within a set of pre-migration experiences and power relations. In interviews, participants noted how they often struggled to narrate their experiences of persecution when confronted by individuals they perceived to be from the 'perpetrator' group, Pakistani Muslims. Thus, many raised concerns about how such encounters triggered memories about difference, discrimination and powerlessness, which all had huge implications on the manner in which individuals presented their evidence. Some participants provided examples of how they found themselves restricted in terms of the depth of factual evidence they could provide, even though they were in a socio-political context in which religion is often assumed not to have any discriminatory powers. In this (supposedly) religious neutral environment, participants were able to quickly identify and recognize officials presumed to be of a Muslim faith heritage through their bodily features. As Deborah, a female refugee recalls:

In my interview the first thing which took my confidence away... was to see a man (with) a long beard which means he was a religious type. ... at this point I doubted if this man was going to do me justice... because when it's a matter of religion, as it was, then whoever it is will support their own religion. ... I was asked 'what group was this in your locality that focused the attack?' I said 'I don't know what group it was, all I know it was a preaching group.' I couldn't say it was a Muslim group because I was scared of this long bearded man ... Do you think that the Home Office is aware that not everyone from Pakistan is the same?

While this strongly resonates with Hopkins' (2010, 74) argument that bodies are "highly charged sites of identity construction", the question of whether the 'Home Office is aware that not everyone from Pakistan is the same' formed a recurring theme, with participants consistently questioning the integrity of the UK asylum regime, specifically due to perceptions of it being religiously insensitive when allocating interlocutors.

In particular, participants with English or biblical names claimed that their names made them overly visible. As Gideon, a male refugee describes:

because the caseworker I was dealing with was a Pakistani Muslim... she could tell immediately from my name that I was a Christian. ... Everyone from a Muslim background knows what this means when someone from their own background has an English name. ... She worked so hard to counter everything I said... dismissing everything I said about living the Christian life in Pakistan ...

On reviewing individual rejection letters, collected for this study, we found a pattern whereby the Home Office increasingly rejected supporting evidence and sometimes claimed that Pakistanis were fraudulent, stating that "there is a high level of corruption in Pakistan and that it is possible to obtain... documents that are fraudulently authenticated by a bona fide stamp or authority".

Based on this institutional practice, participants saw their narratives of persecution as being inevitably ‘embodied’, with their nationality palpably impacting on the manner in which they were judged by immigration officials.

In the context of UKBA’s apparent sub-culture of matching claimants from particular regions with immigration officials of a similar heritage, participants claimed that they could rapidly identify immigration officials of a Pakistani Muslim heritage through their names, both in interviews and through written communications. Elaborating on the issue of names as a marker of identity and using gender as an example, Gerhards and Hans (2009, 1102), argue that “we assume that a letter or an article by a person named Peter, John, or Doug has been written by a male purely on the basis of our previous experiences, even if we have never met the author face-to-face”.

Similarly, Pakistani Christians often linked negative asylum decisions to the names of the immigration officials who handled their cases or signed their refusal letters. Statements like ‘see for yourself, my rejection letter was signed by a Muslim person’ were common amongst participants who desperately felt that they had been unfairly discriminated against by the system. In these conversations, the Home Office’s name featured prominently, as well as being blamed, for undermining claimants’ requests for non-Muslim interlocutors on the basis that the system does not keep a record of its employees’ religious beliefs, in keeping with the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003. As one female refused asylum seeker, Lydia, claimed:

The Home Office letter... was written by a Muslim man (name) and I went to tell my solicitor to write to the Home Office to change... My solicitor told them 'my client is not happy to talk to individuals from a Muslim background'. They asked 'how does she know they are Muslim because we don't record religion?' I said 'because I have lived with the Muslims in the Muslim country ...and I know this kind of name belongs to Muslim people'. ...they said 'no, you will have to manage because these people are professionals...'

While this resonates with Griffiths’ (2012) observation that mistrust is as much a characteristic of claimants’ perspective of the immigration officials as the reverse, it is argued that the situation of Christian asylum seekers from Muslim majority countries may be unique. As explained by the pastor, Simon-Peter:

Christians come here under fear and trauma... thinking Britain is a Christian country... But when they apply for asylum they are assigned people who appear Muslim ... They say, ‘oh we are helpless again here because the majority here again are Muslims’. If you are someone from the same background you understand this psychological fear and helplessness. For them it is just like moving from a shallow cave into a deeper cave...

However, it is crucial not to stereotype and to assume that, for example, all immigration officials of a Pakistani Muslim heritage are biased. In this context some participants emphasised the need to look beyond religious discrimination and focus on some key elements of institutional culture and sub-cultures (Jubany 2011). As one legal advisor, Janet noted:

I'm not a big friend of Home Office personnel generally, but I wouldn't accuse most of them, the Muslim ones, as being very biased, very discriminatory, no. ...a lot of it... is gross incompetence as a result of lack of education and training especially when it

comes to issues of equality, gender, faith, and all that kind of stuff... Also in the Home Office anyone can refuse a claim no matter how junior one is... but when it comes to granting refugee status, it has to go through a senior caseworker... so you can see the main focus is to refuse people... if you want to grant someone you have to justify why...

Conclusion

The article's starting point was to provide the Pakistani context in which religious persecution is experienced. To this end, the data have exposed the deep-rooted, systematic discrimination and frequently extreme persecution that the Christian minority face, and the role that names play in this process, forcing individuals to flee trauma and, increasingly to liberal democratic and supposedly Christian countries such as the UK. Pakistani Christians' experiences of seeking asylum in the UK explicitly demonstrate that their arrival did not mark the end of their traumatic experiences, highlighting not only the challenges of being an asylum seeker but also one from a particular region; in this case, a Muslim majority country. In this way, the case study of Pakistani Christians brings to the fore the challenges of seeking protection in the UK's current asylum context in which reducing the quantity of asylum seekers, preventing terrorism, and speeding up the system are issues at the core of asylum practices. The article has demonstrated the ways in which asylum screening and management processes are invariably shaped by the criteria, values and influence of the immigration system, as informed by "a meta-message of disbelief and deterrence" (Jubany 2011, 88). In so doing, the article has highlighted the role of identities in the categorization and management of claims. Arguably, the key contribution of this article lies in its ability to clearly deconstruct the way in which individuals are sorted out and categorised within predetermined identity boxes, and the central roles of names, bodies, religion and nationality. In this way, the case study of Pakistani Christians has provided an opportunity to extend the existing literature on the role of names, as well as bodies, in labelling individuals as belonging to a particular ethnic group.

I have argued that in responding to the perceived threats of immigration and terrorism, the UKBA has established a 'tick-box classification' which homogenises Pakistanis under a single religious identity – Islam; a situation which causes serious challenges for those who do not conform. Also within the context of the UKBA's current focus of speeding up the asylum system, my data point to the possibility that asylum cases relating to Pakistani Christians are deliberately allocated to caseworkers of a Pakistani heritage, most of whom, as participants perceived, through an assessment of bodily features and names, were individuals of a Pakistani Muslim heritage. This subculture increasingly places complex obstacles in the Christians' endeavour to provide successful verbal evidence of their persecution given the negative experience of a multicultural/faith society in their country of origin.

The research findings also point to a research agenda around the importance of taking religious issues seriously, especially in the context of the current refugee crisis. For example, the unfolding European 'crisis' of refugee movement points to public concerns about the integration of refugees, with the religious identities of refugees forming the context for inclusion and exclusion. Meanwhile many politicians across Europe, have expressed a preference to admit Christian refugees over Muslim refugees. However, in the absence of well-defined selection/identification processes, the pro-Christian political rhetoric, as the case of the Pakistani Christians demonstrates, may serve to obscure complex discriminatory practices and even the context of the reception experience. Thus, while this article does not directly focus on the current migration crisis, it fills an important gap in literature as it provides insights into the

specific challenges that some Christians from Muslim-majority countries face when they move in search of protection and sanctuary.

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