Chapter Three – The Politics of Hate

Chapter summary

This chapter has considered the problematic responses to race hate by society and the state. In doing so it reveals the racialised boundaries that are intertwined with relations of power, politics and control. It suggests that criminological work on hate needs to take into account its centrally political nature. This chapter covers:

- How formal approaches toward hate exceptionalise it as a problem confined to the margins of society and the extremists.

- How this exceptionalisation of hate helps maintain a superficial impression of significant progress by the state in recognizing racism.

- How hate reveals hegemonic struggles over racialised boundaries.

- How the politics of hate thus does not emerge as exceptional, but rather as being fundamental to the maintenance of a racialised social order.

- How hate occurs as part of a web of biopolitical relations which mark out certain ethnic bodies as dangerous, whilst rendering others as un-problematic to determine processes of in/exclusion.

- How response to inadequate hate legislation, campaigns and resistance by members of ethnically marked communities has sought to highlight victimization and injustices.

Links to SAGE articles

Clough, Patricia T. (2003) 'Affect and control: rethinking the body 'beyond sex and gender', *Feminist Theory*, 4(3): 359-364.

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Case study: Anti-Muslim racism and the new minstrelsy?

If mobilization by victims of hate has been important in progressing anti-racist

agendas (see Bowling, 1998), then a critical feature of the contemporary politics of hate has been the drawing of friend/enemy distinction between white working classes and Muslims by the far-right, but in a manner which positions the former as the real victims. This has taken a number of forms, all of which are contested. For instance, the 2001 Oldham riots were bound up with far-right activism and with claims, which were equally perpetuated by the police and the media, of white victimhood, which focused on the allegation that an elderly white man had been the victim of a racist attack by Asians in an Asian area. But Renton (2003) points out that the victim and his family denied that the crime was racially motivated, while Silver (2001) further notes that the location of the assault was not residential (and thus, neither Asian nor white), and that the myths of white victimhood and 'no-go' Asian areas do not withstand scrutiny. Nevertheless, claims of white victimhood by Muslims have galvanized hostility to minorities generally – witness, for instance, the attacks against non-Muslim members of the Asian diasporas – around the simple, emotive claim that white people are under threat, and constitute the invisible victims of multiculturalism. This notion seeks to invert the ways in which the invisibility of whiteness has historically worked as one of its privileges, linked to the normalisation of whiteness and the pathologisation of non-whiteness, around claims that whites as victims of multiculturalism are in fact victims of the traditional victims of racism.

The attempt to deny white privilege and portray white people as victims seeks to represent white privilege not as something which is maintained through oppression of non-white groups, but rather as a natural defence of a whiteness which is claimed as being under threat from minorities. This draws from established racist stereotypes of minorities as a threatening other but seeks to deny its own racism by claiming to be

based on the victim status of whites: in other words, it is represented as being primarily defensive.

The position of 'white victimhood' within the contemporary politics of anti-Muslim hate is also significant in so far as it contradicts the far-right's hostility to anti-racist legislation. This was illustrated when Nick Griffin appeared in court against an Asian Muslim man prosecuted for allegedly racially abusing the British National Party leader. Although the accused man was cleared, the case itself was highly symbolic for it reflected not only the far-right's attempt to portray white people as victims of Muslims, but also because in doing so in formed part of a critique by the far-right of race relations legislation.

Claims of white racial victimhood are not new: white victimism was as central to the anti-Semitic Dreyfus affair in 19th century Paris as it was to the passing of early British immigration legislation amid a context of anti-Semitism and anti-Chinese racism. For extremists, claims of victimhood ideologically bond people into a conspiratorial politics which aims for radical action (Adams and Roscigno, 2005: 768) and critique the 'liberal' multicultural status quo as having been responsible for white working class deprivation (Adams and Roscigno, 2005: 772). Thus, as classed inequalities affecting white working classes are created by structural forces, these are re-constructed in racial terms, so that class inequalities can be re-described as white *racial* victimhood (Gillborn and Kirton, 2000: 272) at the hands of the racialised other. White victimhood thus appeals to the existence of racism but only in so far as it is used cynically to express hostility toward the very changes which are designed to challenge racism. Thus, whites are presented as victims *both* of black and minority

ethnic people, in the case of the current politics of hate, the emphasis is placed on Muslims, *and* of measures to stamp out racism (Gillborn, 2009: 20). It can be argued therefore that a defining feature of the discourse of white racial victimhood as it is played out in the contemporary politics of hate is, then, the desire to maintain the white privilege of being able to carry out racism unchallenged by anti-racist legislation.

Another feature of white victimhood lies in its parodic nature. This underscores to the affective and emotional currency of contemporary control racism, since it appeals simultaneously to a range of emotions in mobilizing whites: resentment, humour, cynicism, hate, and so forth. The cynical nature of claims to white victimhood which are made by the far-right in mobilizing a politics of anti-Muslim hate act as a skit on the description of an incident as racial, and parody black and minority ethnic people's complaints to have experienced racism. Thus, as white victimhood becomes aligned with the mocking of anti-racist measures (Gabriel, 1996: 130), it also comes to work as a structural homology for older forms of cultural politics designed to maintain white privilege, such as minstrelsy. For this reason, the discourse of white victimhood caricatures an ethnically marked other in order to discuss taboo topics and protect white privilege, and thus works as a form of latter-day minstrelsy (Wellman, 1997). This framing highlights the historical ruptures and transformations which frame 21st century politics of hate. While earlier forms of minstrelsy worked through offensive mimicry of phenotype characteristics of black people and disguised their hateful message through 'entertainment', contemporary minstrelsy works through stereotypes of cultural markers of racial difference to express new racist ideas (Barker 1981) about the cultural erosion of a way of life (Gillborn and Kirton, 2000: 280); Jennifer

Trainor's research illustrates this in an American school context in which racist ideas are disarmed through the message that their articulants simply seek a sense of 'community' or an end to 'reverse racism' (Trainor 2008: 92-101). Thus, recognizing that racial victimhood is historically contingent (Chesler et al., 2003: 225) forces us to recognize the dominant framings which shape the emergence of politics of white racial victimhood and minstrelsy in differing historical contexts, as they rework hateful messages in apparently disarming ways. Our consideration of this new minstrelsy is not to suggest that there do not exist instances of white victimhood in racial incidents, but rather to highlight the cynical centring of claims of white racial victimhood by the far-right in the commission of a generalized politics of hate, as a central locus of meaning and mobilization to enact hate against the non-white other (as opposed to a simple politics of seeking to challenge racism).

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