

POLICING DIVERSE BRITAIN IN THE 21st CENTURY

5th October 2011, National Black Police Association Conference,

Edinburgh, Scotland.

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In considering the theme of today's conference – I was struck by the irony of its assertion – firstly because it presumes that the police force is comfortable with the notion of diversity and secondly– because it also assumes that a decade on since the publication of the Macpherson Report there has been a progression in the way Black communities are policed.

I believe that the evidence suggests that there remains a fundamental breach in trust and confidence between BME communities and the police - and this crisis has deepened to such an extent that it's no longer just Black communities but also Black police officers who find themselves on the wrong side of the Race divide.

The statistics in the region I come from speak for themselves. In the most recent survey carried out by the West Yorkshire Black Police Association:

- 71% of BME officers said they'd experienced discrimination, bullying, harassment and unfair treatment at work and
- 80% felt that disciplinary investigations and work-performance related issues were not fair, transparent or proportionate
- 4% of Asian officers were suspended compared to 0.09% of white officers despite the under-representation of BME officers

As a racial justice organisation I've witnessed first hand the blighted lives and careers that lie behind these statistics.

PC Kashif Ahmed was facing 10 charges on grounds of obtaining

pecuniary advantage by deception and fraud. He was interviewed in excess of 19 times by the Professional Standards Department and during 8 of these interviews he was held for over 13 hours. He spent some 35 hours in police custody over a number of months, suffered 24 months of investigation and was falsely arrested 16 times.

He was interviewed by the Murder Team for renting his house on a residential mortgage and approx 21 officers were assigned to the investigation. The cost to the taxpayer is believed to have been in the region of £1/2 million.

His friend - 47 year-old Shamim Khan who suffers from a diagnosed illness was also arrested by 6 police officers in connection with his case, allegedly for giving him a reference 6 years earlier. She was dragged out of her home in her pajamas while she was having a panic attack. They took her to a police station 1 hour away when her nearest designated police station was just 5 mins away. She was not assessed by doctor. She was detained for 14 hours. The officers tricked her stating the interview was about a character reference for PC Ahmed when clearly it was about other matters. She was detained for 14 hours and interviewed 5 times over a period of 7 hours.

Iris - another middle-aged woman - also known to both Kashif and Shamim was harassed and threatened by police officers to provide a statement against Kashif over a period of 9 months. She too was arrested because she refused to make a statement against Kashif and Shamim.

I am presenting this case - because as the coordinator for the Justice for Kashif Campaign, I couldn't believe the impunity with which the Professional Standards Department was conducting the investigation.

I wrote to the Independent Police Complaint's Commission calling for an investigation into their conduct and instead of taking my concerns

seriously, the matter was referred back to the very department I was lodging a complaint against. This is akin to my Board asking me to investigate a complaint against me by a member of my staff – it would not stand up in front of a Tribunal.

The persistence of such practices are in my view tantamount to sticking up the proverbial two fingers to the Macpherson Report and promoting a perpetrator's charter in which there's no scrutiny nor accountability in the way in which some senior police officers conduct themselves.

When Kashif's case came to court after a 3-year investigation, the judge called for "the entirety of this indictment to be stayed because of the untruthfulness of a number of the investigative team." He expressed grave concerns over the "very significant irregularity and impropriety at the root of the investigation; which he considered "an affront to justice" and his honor described the police officers as "evasive" and "untruthful".

I know of other BME police officers who have been driven over the edge when subjected to such prolonged investigation. PC David Blair was accused of deriving pecuniary advantage from renting his home on a residential mortgage. As an officer who had received a number of commendations for acts of bravery, he was so traumatized by his ordeal that he attempted to commit suicide by throwing himself off a bridge. The case against him also collapsed when the Judge threw it out of court.

PC Simon Jenkins was not so fortunate – he made two attempts on his life while he was being investigated by the PSD on allegations of fraud. The first attempt was while he was in custody and on his second attempt he succeeded in ending his life.

The roll call of victims I know of who've suffered disproportionately at the hands of Professional Standards only to be acquitted when their cases have come to Court include:

Kamran – arrested for passing information and for evading council tax

Wasim – arrested for making a false statutory declaration. The case against him was withdrawn by CPS. He remained suspended for a further 12 months before his misconduct hearing, a total of over 3 years on suspension on full pay. He was fined one weeks wage and returned to work.

Talib – arrested for allegedly advertising to sell two counterfeit hair straighteners on behalf of his cousin. He was arrested by 10 police officers. He was found not guilty at court but the Force sacked him anyway.

Many of the BME officers I've spoken to believe there is strong case for pursuing criminal investigation against the PSD on grounds of false arrest, misfeasance in public office, perjury and fabrication of evidence in some of the above cases.

But none of the officers appear to have been disciplined or investigated – or if they have it's certainly not been in the full glare of the trial-by-media that all the above victims were subject to.

I believe that the reason why police officers feel they can behave with such impunity is because the institutionally racist culture within the police force merely mirrors the racism within our political culture.

- When we have a Home Secretary attempting to bring in stop and search 'sus' laws that allow the targeting of Black and Asian people on grounds of their ethnicity
- When we have a Prime Minister who hands a propaganda coup to the Far Right by declaring that state multiculturalism has failed and that Muslims have a predisposition to extremism and do not subscribe to democracy and liberal values
- When you have a government that views the Equalities legislation as

a bureaucratic encumbrance and Red Tape and is prepared to peddle in half-truths – blaming terrorists and cats – in an attempt to undermine the Human Rights Act

- When you have successive governments prepared to frame counter-terrorism policies in ways which demonise the entire Muslim community - then we should not be surprised if the police force replicates this politics of Us and Them in their dealings with Black citizens and officers.

We know that racism within the police force has a long historical trajectory:

In 1981 -- the Scarman Report blamed the Brixton Riots on the “ill-considered, immature and racially prejudiced actions of some officers”.

In 1999 - the seminal Macpherson Report – blamed the murder of Stephen Lawrence on the failure of leadership, professional incompetence and Institutional Racism.

In 2004 - the Morris Report – highlighted “disproportionality” in the way ethnic minority officers are treated in the management of their conduct.

And more recently in 2011 - The Peter Neyroud Report blamed an overwhelming white male culture which maintains its longevity by dishing out jobs for the boys.

The Report recommended greater diversity within the police force to reverse this macho culture. However, the BME police officers I spoke to were not convinced – they felt that unless there was an explicit commitment to tackling institutional racism, the NBPA should not allow itself to be used as a tick-box to support further BME recruitment.

I understand their reasons – millions of pounds of public monies have been spent on Inquiries – thousands of hours have been spent by the

great and the good in writing reports and proposing recommendations - yet the police force has remained institutionally racist.

What we're battling here is not the overt racism of the canteen culture of yesteryears but a racism that's become more covert and sophisticated - what Commander Ali Dazei calls post-modern racism. He believes this has ensured that Power remains predominantly White where it really matters - within anti-terrorism commands, firearm teams, and management boards - and Black police officers are brought into the inner sanctum only if they're prepared to prop up the status quo. Whether you agree with this analysis or not, the feedback I have received is that where Black police officers have resisted the pressure to conform, their life - according to one police officer - has been made "a living hell".

The stakes in policing the BME community are high - the Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police, Norman Bettison who is also the terrorism lead for ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) made it clear that his neighbourhood policing strategy is closely aligned to UK's response to Al' Qaeda' terrorism. Make no mistake that this strategy relies on Muslim officers and BME staff - many of you here in this auditorium - to serve as the benign face of community surveillance.

So if some of the key strands of policing like Prevent, Channel and counter-terrorism policies are configured in such a way that they treat Muslims as a suspect community, then we should not be surprised if Muslim police officers are treated with similar suspicion.

A Muslim officer within the West Yorkshire Police - who cannot be named - found out that he was under suspicion as a potential terrorist after he attended a police leadership training course. Participants were asked what they would die for - his response - that he would die for his faith did not become an issue until it was discovered he was a Muslim. This led to

a chain of events where he was interviewed by 2 senior officers in clear breach of police procedures – a practice which many officers have described as “fishing expeditions.” It led to his vetting status being reviewed, his integrity being challenged and his connections with a Muslim charity being questioned.

So in this frenzied post 7/7 atmosphere, what we are seeing is not just institutional racism but institutional Islamaphobia becoming embedded within the culture of the police service.

So to come back to the central proposition of today’s conference: Can modern day policing practice be brought into the 21st century? The BME police officers I spoke to were highly skeptical but they did proffer the following solutions:

First – they called for an immediate halt to the adversarial culture against BME officers and pointed to Police Regulation 2008 which called for matters to be dealt with in-house in the first instance.

Second: they wanted the current practice of the PSD investigating themselves to be halted urgently as it contravened the principles of natural justice.

Third: they wanted their senior managers to demonstrate leadership by holding the Professional Standards department to account.

Fourth, they wanted the IPCC to assert its independence by investigating complaints without fear or favour.

Fifth, they advocated the establishment of an independent BME lay

scrutiny framework to review the decisions made by the PSD – in my view this is key as it brings objective scrutiny to the decisions made by the PSD.

Sixth, they felt that any diversity training had to incorporate both anti-racism training and sessions that enhanced understanding about Islam.

Seventh: they wanted the practice of undertaking disciplinary proceedings and refusing to reinstate dismissed police officers after the courts had acquitted officers to be urgently halted as it made a mockery of the judicial process.

Eighth – they wanted a renewed commitment to implementing the Recommendations of the Macpherson, Morris and the National Black Police Association's Reports.

Ninth – to bring the NBPA and its regional officers into the heart of internal decision-making.

Finally and most critically: for the Home Office Minister, Chief Constables and senior managers to demonstrate leadership in challenging institutional racism and institutional Islamophobia within their Service.

For my part I believe that all of you present here today are the conscience of the Black community – how you challenge the police culture internally has huge significance in terms of how Black communities are policed and criminalised externally.

Secondly, I believe that Language has an immense potency – the language of diversity, equality, cohesion and integration – are terms

imposed on us by those who have power over us – they burden us with responsibilities while taking away our right to be treated equitably and with respect and dignity.

We need to call the prevailing culture what it is – Institutionally Racist and Institutionally Islamophobic. If we do not call it what it is then we will never be able to deal with the symptoms, never mind find a cure.

I remember when I started my career in Southall, I was introduced to Doreen Lawrence as the domestic violence worker – it was only later that I discovered that she was the mother of a young Black man who had been recently murdered. What struck me was her selflessness because like the many victims that she supported - she too was a victim – yet she gave of her time as a volunteer.

If her fight for justice is to mean anything at all – then we owe it to Doreen Lawrence and other mothers who have lost their sons – to call the prevailing practice what it is – institutionally racist. If we repeat it often enough – at least we can put our hands on our hearts and say with honesty that Stephen Lawrence and those who died before and after him did not die in vain.

Thank you

NOTE: The information used to compile this speech has in part been provided by third parties interviewed during the research stage, no liability is therefore accepted regarding the content of the report or its correctness, any errors should be reported to the writer.