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'They Make Us Feel Like We're a Virus': The Multiple Impacts of Islamophobic Hostility Towards Veiled Muslim Women

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Abstract

Within the prevailing post-9/11 climate, veiled Muslim women are commonly portrayed as oppressed, 'culturally dangerous' and 'threatening' to the western way of life and to notions of public safety and security by virtue of being fully covered in the public sphere. It is in such a context that manifestations of Islamophobia often emerge as a means of responding to these 'threats'. Drawing from qualitative data elicited through a UK-based study, this article reflects upon the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women as actual and potential victims of Islamophobia and examines the impacts of Islamophobic attacks upon victims, their families and wider Muslim communities. Among the central themes we explore are impacts upon their sense of vulnerability, the visibility of their Muslim identity, and the management of their safety in public. The individual and collective harms associated with this form of victimisation are considered through notions of a worldwide, transnational Muslim community, the *ummah*, which connects Muslims from all over world. We conclude by noting that the effects of this victimisation are not exclusively restricted to the global *ummah*; rather, the harm extends to society as a whole by exacerbating the polarisation which already exists between 'us' and 'them'.

Keywords

Islamophobia; veil; Muslim women; victimisation; targeted hostility.

Introduction

The wearing of the Muslim face covering (hereafter 'the veil') has become increasingly vilified of late in the West. It is stereotypically seen as a 'threat' to notions of national cohesion and public safety; a visual embodiment of gender oppression, self-segregation and the existence of parallel communities. It is thought to exacerbate the social isolation of veiled Muslim women by hindering face-to-face communication and broader engagement with non-Muslims. The wearing of the veil is also understood as a practice synonymous with religious fundamentalism and, as such, one which fosters political extremism. Seen in this context, the veil is linked to the global

'war on terror' and, more recently, to the rise of the terrorist group ISIS in Iraq and Syria through its purported capacity to be used as disguise for a terrorist. Taken in isolation or collectively, these stereotypes are commonly presented as justification for expressions and acts of hostility towards veiled Muslim women. Such attacks are responses to the perceived multiple 'threats' of the veil as a symbol of gender oppression, self-segregation and Islamist terrorism.

At the same time, the construction of the veil exclusively through the lens of gender oppression and violence has triggered a spate of national and international reforms focused on the criminal law, which are used to justify state restrictions on the wearing of the veil in public. In 2010, France became the first European country to ban the wearing of the veil in public whilst Belgium adopted a similar ban in 2011. In July 2014, the European Court of Human Rights upheld the veil ban in France, declaring that the idea of 'living together' was the 'legitimate aim' of the French authorities and thereby lending support to the construction of the veil as a 'threat' to integration. In Spain, the city of Barcelona and other regions have brought in similar bans, as have some towns in Italy. Germany has no national law restricting the wearing of Muslim veils, but half of Germany's 16 state governments have outlawed the wearing of both headscarves and veils by teachers. Although the UK does not have any legislative prohibitions in place, a judge at Blackfriars crown court in London refused to allow a Muslim woman to stand trial in a veil because 'the principle of open justice overrode the woman's religious beliefs' (Hickey 2013). Similar restrictions have been introduced outside of Europe too. For instance, in 2011 the Canadian government made it illegal for Muslim women to wear a veil at citizenship ceremonies, while in Western Australia a law requiring Muslim women to remove their veil in order to prove their identity to police was passed in 2013. More recently, in the wake of the rise of terrorist group ISIS, a number of Australian politicians have called for the banning of the veil in public in New South Wales on the basis that the veil could be used for the purposes of terrorism (Barker 2014).

As we have argued elsewhere (Chakraborti and Zempi 2013), stereotypes about the 'threat' of the veil and the growth of veil ban policies promote a climate of anti-Islamic intolerance and hostility, thereby legitimising violence directed towards veiled Muslim women. This climate fuels a negative discourse which reinforces the dehumanisation of veiled Muslim women by removing any sense of agency on the part of the veil wearer, and which renders them as 'easy targets' for verbal abuse and physical attacks when they are seen in public. However, despite their vulnerability to public hostility, veiled Muslim women are rarely included within studies of victimisation, a factor which in itself exacerbates their marginalisation from both academic discourses and mainstream society.

Drawing from qualitative data elicited through a UK-based study, we examine the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women as actual and potential victims of Islamophobia and consider the individual, familial, community and societal harms that are associated with this form of victimisation. Within this framework, our article is premised on four lines of argument. First, we argue that individual experiences of Islamophobic victimisation increase feelings of insecurity and vulnerability amongst veiled Muslim women, thereby diminishing their sense of belonging, confidence and willingness to integrate into society. Secondly, we suggest that both the fear and the reality of being subjected to targeted hostility can have significant consequences for victims' families, limiting their movements and interactions and amplifying their sense of social isolation. Thirdly, we consider the collective harms associated with this victimisation through notions of a worldwide, transnational Muslim community, the *ummah*, which connects Muslims from all over world. We posit that the threat of Islamophobic victimisation impacts upon notions of safety within the wider Muslim community by reinforcing the fear that all Muslims are vulnerable to attacks due to their group membership. Finally, we conclude that the effects of Islamophobic victimisation are not exclusively restricted to women who adhere to Muslim codes of dress, their families and wider Muslim communities; rather, the harm extends to society as a whole by exacerbating the polarisation that already exists between

'us' and 'them'. Before contextualising these harms, the article first describes the methods employed in the study.

Methods

Since 9/11 there has been considerable discussion about the growth of Islamophobia in the West (see, for example, Allen 2010; Kumar 2012; Poynting and Mason 2007; Sayyid and Vakil 2011). However, this discussion has not been accompanied by as much empirical analysis of Islamophobia as one might expect (Moosavi 2015). In particular, there is a dearth of studies examining the lived experiences of Muslim women who wear the *niqab*[1] in public in the West. As a result, veiled Muslim women remain a relatively 'invisible' population in research terms, despite their vulnerability to Islamophobic attacks in public. The study upon which this article is based contributes to an under-researched topic, wherein the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia are understood through the lens of veil-wearing by both the researched and the researcher. As such, this is original, groundbreaking research as it is among the first empirical studies to focus specifically on '*niqabis*' – that is, Muslim women who wear the face covering – and to include an ethnographic strand wherein the researcher wore the face veil herself in order to gain first-hand experiences of Islamophobia.

The main component of this research took the form of a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with veiled Muslim women. The study was comprised of 60 individual interviews and 20 focus group interviews with veiled Muslim women who had been victims of Islamophobic hostility in public places, and this was supplemented by an ethnographic strand discussed below. Elsewhere we have described Islamophobia as 'a fear or hatred of Islam that translates into ideological and material forms of cultural racism against obvious markers of "Muslimness"' (Chakraborti and Zempi 2012: 271). Using this framework we emphasise the link between the ideology of Islamophobia and manifestations of such attitudes, triggered by the visibility of the victim's (perceived) Muslim identity. This approach interprets Islamophobia as a 'new' form of racism, whereby Islamic religion, tradition and culture are seen as a 'threat' to the Western way of life.

The fieldwork was conducted in the city of Leicester between 2011 and 2012. Leicester is located at the heart of the East Midlands of England and has a population of approximately 330,000 according to most recent census data (Office for National Statistics 2011). Leicester residents hail from over 50 countries from across the globe, making the city one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse places in the UK. In view of its diverse mix of cultures and faiths, Leicester is commonly depicted as the UK's most ethnically harmonious city and as a successful model of multiculturalism both nationally and internationally. Moreover, the city has a large and rapidly expanding population of Muslims and veil-wearing women, making it an ideal site in which to conduct this particular study.

With respect to the fieldwork, it is useful to consider the status of Irene, one of this article's authors. Irene is a white, Orthodox Christian, female researcher documenting veiled Muslim women's lived experiences of Islamophobic victimisation. In particular, being a non-Muslim researcher meant that access to potential participants was not always guaranteed. Clearly, 'getting in' or gaining access for qualitative interviewing can be challenging depending upon the perceptions of participants and gatekeepers regarding 'outsider' researchers. Within this study, key informants such as veiled Muslim women from local communities played an important role in designing the fieldwork in terms of using religiously and culturally appropriate language and behaviour. For example, attention to dress and demeanour was an important consideration throughout the fieldwork, particularly when visiting mosques, Muslim schools and Islamic community centres. Additionally, engaging with local Muslim organisations as well as community leaders eased access to veiled Muslim women. In the context of researching minority communities, Phillips and Bowling (2003) argue that the involvement of members of

those communities in all stages of the process increases the chances of making the correct fieldwork choices. Ultimately, this approach enables the researcher to break down any cultural, religious or racial barriers that may exist between the researcher and the researched (Garland, Spalek and Chakraborti 2006).

The difficulties of using a male researcher for this kind of research should also be acknowledged. The principle of avoiding contact with 'non-*mahram*'[2] men is pivotal for Muslim women who wear the veil. According to the Quran and the Sunnah (the way of life of Prophet Muhammad), free-mixing and socialisation between unrelated, non-*mahram* men and women is strictly forbidden in Islam, at least as a general rule, unless a woman has a *mahram* in her presence such as her husband, father, brother or son. However, the presence of other male family members during the interview could potentially limit the extent to which participants are able disclose their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation to a male interviewer, thereby underlining the importance of a female researcher within the context of the present study.

In addition to individual and focus group interviews with veiled Muslim women, the study also included an ethnographic element, which involved Irene wearing the veil for prolonged periods of time in public places. By adopting the dress code of veiled Muslim women, the intention was to feel part of their 'reality'. However, it is important to note that this was a supplementary strand of the overall methodology rather than its central component. During the process Irene assumed a covert role and did not disclose the fact that she was a researcher to members of the public and as a result they behaved naturally in her presence. This covert role was essential to the success of the ethnographic research. It is highly likely that people's awareness of her status as a researcher would influence how they treated her, which would potentially mask the true dimensions of public expressions of Islamophobic prejudice. The various situations that she encountered because of her perceived Muslim identity resulted in her being subjected to verbal abuse, harassment and potential physical attacks. The ethnographic fieldwork is discussed in more detail elsewhere (Zempi and Chakraborti 2014) but its value to the process of understanding veiled Muslim women's experiences as victims of Islamophobia – and recognising how 'low-level' Islamophobic victimisation was embedded within their daily lives – should not be understated.

At the same time though, it is important to explore the limits of this ethnographic approach. There has been a long history of imperial feminists assuming the veil in order to penetrate Muslim space (see, *inter alia*, Poole 1845) and it is a strategy that has increasingly been deployed by white, western, non-Muslim journalists when the veil has been in the news. It is clear that wearing the veil as an 'outsider' does not allow researchers to fully understand the depth of veiled Muslim women's experiences of Islamophobia. Nevertheless, Imtoual (2009) observes that valuable contributions can be made in this context by white, western, non-Muslim researchers as long as they draw heavily upon principles of self-reflexive research practices. This was highly relevant in the framing of the present study: while it may not have been possible to fully appreciate the lived realities of Islamophobic victimisation in light of Irene's outsider status as a white, western, non-Muslim woman, the inclusion of an ethnographic dimension contributed to this process of understanding and supplemented the insights gleaned from face-to-face interviews.

Individual harms

Being a victim of any kind of crime can have devastating and long term impacts upon individuals including emotional, psychological, behavioural, physical and financial effects. But as a form of hate crime, Islamophobic victimisation can be particularly distressing and frightening for victims. The existing literature on the impacts of hate crimes show that hate crimes are more deleterious than non-hate crimes (Botcherby et al. 2011; Iganski 2001; Smith et al. 2012). Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that the harms of this victimisation may exceed that of

'normal' crime because of the nature, severity, frequency and consequences of being targeted on the basis of identity characteristics or perceived 'difference' (see, *inter alia*, Chakraborti, Garland and Hardy 2014; Garland and Chakraborti 2006; Herek, Cogan and Gillis 2002; Levin and McDevitt 1993; Williams and Tregidga 2014).

In addition to the physical harms arising from violent expressions of Islamophobia, there are distinct emotional harms associated with this victimisation. Throughout individual and focus group interviews, nearly all research participants argued that their confidence had been severely affected as a result of their recurring experiences of targeted hostility, with many using terms such as feeling 'worthless', 'unwanted' and that they 'didn't belong'. Seen in this light, acts of Islamophobic hate crime damage notions of belonging whilst maintaining the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. This highlights the immediate effect of Islamophobic victimisation which is to undermine victims' sense of attachment and security, whilst the longer-term impact is to create fear about living in a particular locality and to inspire a wish to move away (Bowling 2009). In this regard, geographical spaces are created in which veiled Muslim women are made to feel unwelcome and vulnerable to attack and from which they may eventually be excluded. This point is illustrated in the following quotation.

> Recently someone said 'Why don't you go back home?' People think that because I'm covered up I'm not British. How should I dress to be British then? Would you say miniskirts are a British way of dressing? I'm the sort of person who wants to be accepted and it knocks my confidence when people say these things. (Yasmine, 28 years old)

Experiences of Islamophobic hostility increased feelings of insecurity, vulnerability and anxiety amongst participants, particularly for repeat victims. Relatedly, it is important to recognise these experiences of victimisation as a process rather than as 'one-off' or incidental occurrences. On the evidence of our research, Islamophobic hostility is 'part and parcel' of veiled Muslim women's everyday life, and this reinforces the sense of constant risk for actual and potential victims. As Bowling (2009) points out, repeated or persistent victimisation can undermine the security of actual and potential victims and induce fear and anxiety. Indeed, the distressing nature of Islamophobic victimisation, coupled with the frequency with which these acts were committed, had created high levels of fear amongst participants, especially in public places. In line with the apparent exclusionary intent and impact of this victimisation, participants felt extremely wary in public, as illustrated in the following comments.

> Every day I step out of my house I fear that I might not return. (Iman, 37 years old)

> When people abuse me I feel intimidated because I don't know where to go and there's no one actually there to help me. It is so frightening because I'm on my own and there's a group of them. (Aliyah, 18 years old)

The threat of Islamophobic victimisation had long-lasting effects for individual victims including making them afraid to leave their homes and feeling like social outcasts. As a result a common sensation cited by participants was that of panic attacks, worry, extreme anxiety and depression, which was said to derive from the fear of having to endure future victimisation when in public. Thus participants were often reluctant to leave the house through fear of being attacked, particularly on the street, in parks, in shops and on public transport. Some participants referred to feeling afraid of stepping out of their homes and, to avoid future attacks, they negotiated their safety in public by not travelling by foot (and especially not alone) and by using public transport as little as possible. Participants also emphasised that they never felt safe in public and therefore they always had to be vigilant, as the following quotations show.

> I'm always cautious of what is happening around to make sure that I'm safe.
> (Nadia, 29 years old)
> I always role play it in my head 'Right, if somebody comes up to me what am I going to do? I'll do this, do that' whereas I should not be thinking that way.
> (Alisha, 44 years old)

Moreover, participants referred to changing patterns of social interaction which often culminated in isolation and withdrawal. As Hindelang (2009) points out, for an experience of victimisation to occur, the prime actors – the offender and the victim – must have the occasion to intersect in time and space. By removing themselves from public space or by spending less time in public places, participants in our study reduced the chances of being subjected to Islamophobic hostility. Accordingly, participants spoke of feeling safe by confining themselves to their home as much as possible, with many participants explaining that they would only go out if it was deemed absolutely necessary. In this case the home was understood as a retreat from the hostility of the outside world and a key source of personal sense of security.

At the same time, many participants described feeling like 'prisoners in their own home'. Although the experience and fear of victimisation had 'forced' these participants to withdraw from wider social participation, this was seen as the 'only way' to decrease their sense of vulnerability as they felt that there was nowhere else that they could be safe from the threat of Islamophobic victimisation. This infers that negotiations of personal safety can create a sense of imprisonment on the basis that they restrict veiled Muslim women's participation in society, although decreasing exposure to Islamophobic victimisation in public.

> It stops me from going out. I only go out when it is absolutely necessary, for example, to go to the shops or for medical treatment. (Latifah, 46 years old)

> It feels like we are under house arrest. People have locked us up without realising it. (Duniya, 27 years old)

> People are being hypocritical in their argument that women in veil are oppressed because they oppress us. We are stuck at home all day. (Focus group participant)

It is evident that participants feared for their safety; however, this sense of vulnerability depended upon the geographical area in which they were located. For example, participants felt safer in areas where the Muslim public presence was well-established by virtue of 'safety in numbers'. By contrast, in areas where the Muslim population was rather small, the sense of vulnerability as well as the risk of attack was perceived to be significantly higher. Mythen, Walklate and Khan (2009) note that the fear of abuse restricts Muslims' freedom of movement in public, use of community facilities and visits to 'hostile' areas, while Tarlo (2007) highlights the reluctance of veiled Muslim women to visit areas in London where they will be in a sartorial minority. These themes were certainly evident within the context of our research, with participants' fear increasing when visiting 'hostile' or unknown areas and decreasing in more familiar or Muslim-friendly areas. In the context of the ethnographic strand of the study, Irene felt that she was under constant threat and needed to be alert all the time whilst wearing the veil in public. She encountered numerous expressions of anti-Muslim hostility such as persistent staring, angry looks, being routinely ignored by shop assistants, Islamophobic comments such as 'Terrorist', 'Muslim bomber' and 'Go back to Afghanistan' and, as a result, Irene felt vulnerable to physical attacks particularly in the 'whiter' parts of the city (see also Zempi and Chakraborti 2014).

This discussion illustrates how the enactment of physical geographical boundaries impacts upon 'emotional geographies' in relation to the way in which participants perceived the spaces and places inside and outside their 'comfort zones' (Hopkins 2007). Rather than risk the threat

of being attacked, many actual and potential victims choose to retreat to their 'own' communities and as a result become reclusive. Clearly, this limits the behavioural options and life choices of individuals as it determines their area of residence, their vocational pursuits and leisure activities, their mode of transport, and even their access to educational opportunities. Concurrently, this reality often results in segregation in housing, transportation, education, employment and leisure activities. However, for Perry and Alvi (2012) this is not a voluntary choice; rather it is the 'safe' choice. They highlight that the potential for future victimisation creates social and geographical yet 'invisible' boundaries, across which members of the Muslim community are not 'welcome' to step. From this perspective, Islamophobic victimisation acts as a form of emotional terrorism on the basis that it segregates and isolates Muslims, particularly in terms of restricting their freedom of movement in the public sphere and changing their patterns of social interaction.

Correspondingly, the constant threat of Islamophobic victimisation had forced participants to adopt a siege mentality and keep a low profile when in public in order to reduce the potential for future attacks. Allen (2010) observes that veiled Muslim women often try to become less 'visible' and therefore less vulnerable by taking the veil off. In this regard, experiences of previous victimisation can lead to numerous strategies of identity management, often geared toward the need to publicly validate the self as 'safe' (Mythen et al. 2009). Indeed, participants reported playing down their 'Muslimness' through reluctantly removing their veils in public places. As such, they tried to manage impressions of their Muslim identity mainly through concealment with the aim of reducing the risk of Islamophobic victimisation (Ghumman and Ryan 2013).

> I take it off when I leave this area [Leicester] to avoid abuse. What else can I do?

> The purpose of the *niqab* for the woman is to protect her but if the woman feels the veil will harm her, she is allowed to take it off. (Focus group participants)

Taking the veil off temporarily was referred to by some participants as a potential coping mechanism to reduce their sense of vulnerability and risk of future attacks, although this was only ever described as a measure of last resort. Another practical strategy of resilience included walking in numbers and preferably with a male companion. As we would expect from the earlier discussion of Islamophobia as a form of emotional terrorism – on the basis that it segregates and isolates 'visible' Muslims in certain or all public places – the fear of future attacks had restricted participants' freedom of movement, especially in the absence of other family members. As the comments below indicate, having a male companion was often reassuring as a form of protection against possible attacks. For some participants, even having their children with them made a difference.

> I know it sounds really sad but I don't want to go out alone. I prefer my husband to be with me or even my children.

> It depends on where I go because in familiar areas I can go on my own but if I go somewhere else I normally take my husband or my father. (Focus group participants)

Familial harms

Frequent and ongoing experiences of Islamophobic victimisation, coupled with the potential for future attacks, affected and sometimes seriously damaged the quality of life of participants' families. Throughout interviews and focus group discussions it became evident that participants' children were affected by this victimisation, especially in cases where they had witnessed such incidents. For young children, witnessing their mother being abused was

confusing, commonplace and extremely upsetting and, in some instances, it became clear that the decision of some Muslim girls not to wear the veil had been shaped by their indirect experiences of Islamophobic hostility. These points are illustrated in the following comments.

> I was on my own with my five year old daughter in London, going to get the bus so I was crossing the road. A man in a big car, it was an English man in his 50s, pulled down his window and shouted swear words. Then my daughter started crying. She kept talking about it all day saying 'Why was that man so horrible mummy?' (Nadia, 29 years old)

> My daughters don't want to practise the veil. They are afraid because they see all the abuse I get when we are in town [Leicester City Centre]. (Raniyah, 48 years old)

In some instances the harms associated with this victimisation were more profound for those participants concerned about the safety and wellbeing of their children. The process of victimisation experienced by participants often restricted their freedom in terms of their willingness to allow themselves and their families to visit certain parts of their local area or even to set foot outside their own house through fear of attack in public. In this sense, both the experience and threat of Islamophobic attack in public created a fear of leaving the house for victims and for other family members including siblings and elders. The reluctance of family members to leave the house was often attributed to the abuse that veiled Muslim women suffered in public due to the visibility of their Muslim identity. For many participants, the threat of ongoing or future attacks had resulted in their feeling compelled to make quite significant changes to their lifestyle patterns in order to protect themselves, their children and other family members, changes which almost inevitably compounded their sense of isolation and withdrawal from their local community.

> I had to go onto anti-depressants because I'm just so afraid to take my children anywhere. Why do I need my husband to take me to the park? I have to think of everything now like 'Is it safe to go out?' whereas before it wasn't like that. I feel like I'm stopping my children from doing stuff because I'm so afraid to go out. (Yasmine, 28 years old)

Furthermore, participants emphasised the negative effects of this victimisation upon male members of their family such as their father, brothers, husband and sons who felt inclined to protect them. Some also drew links between this sense of frustration and anger felt by male family members and the risk of radicalisation amongst young Muslim men who have grown up witnessing their mother, sisters or female relatives being attacked by virtue of being fully veiled in public.

> Muslim men feel that their women are under attack so they are going to feel very defensive. Women in Islam are held in high regard by the whole household and by the Muslim community. (Nazia, 50 years old)

> We are a close-knit community. Even if you're not married, you have a father, an uncle, a brother or a nephew who feels for you so it affects the male population too. (Faridah, 36 years old)

> My boys feel very angry. I think these things unfortunately drive young Muslim men to do things that they wouldn't normally do. When you're young, your emotions are all over the place and if somebody you respect and love is attacked, you would do things that you wouldn't normally do. (Lubna, 40 years old)

Community and societal harms

The emotional, psychological and behavioural harms associated with victimisation are not restricted to victims and their families: rather, the harm extends to the wider Muslim community. This shows that Islamophobic hostility affects not only the individual victim but also the collective victim. Correspondingly, the individual and familial fear discussed above is accompanied by the collective fear amongst all Muslims, and particularly those who have a highly 'visible' Muslim identity.

Iganski (2001) and Perry (2001) observe that hate crimes are 'message crimes' whereby a message of hate, terror and vulnerability is communicated to the victim's broader community. Within this framework, incidents of Islamophobia send out a terroristic message to the wider Muslim community. In this sense, awareness of the potential for Islamophobic victimisation enhances the sense of fearfulness and insecurity of all Muslims due to their group membership. According to Perry's (2001) conceptualisation of hate crime as a mechanism for doing difference, the intent of hate crime offenders is to send a message to multiple audiences: the victim, who needs to be punished for his/her inappropriate performance of identity; the victim's community, who need to learn that they too are vulnerable to the same fate; and the broader community, who are reminded of the appropriate alignment of 'us' and 'them'. From this perspective, Islamophobic victimisation is directed toward the collective and not simply the individual victim. This emphasises the *in terrorem* effect of hate crime: intimidation of the group by the victimisation of one or a few members of that group (Weinstein 1992).

Correspondingly, a number of participants perceived the nature of their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation as 'message crimes'. They argued that the 'message' was received loud and clear. Participants were conscious of the fact that all Muslims were vulnerable to abuse, violence and harassment on account of their group identity as followers of Islam. Throughout interviews and focus group discussions the consensus view amongst participants was that the wider Muslim community is under attack by virtue of the fact that 'an attack on one Muslim is an attack on all'. For Muslims this is a crucial aspect of their faith; they are one body in Islam and 'when any part of the body suffers, the whole body feels the pain'. As the following quotations demonstrate, Islamophobic victimisation is unique in the consciousness of the wider Muslim community through notions of a worldwide, transnational Muslim community, the *ummah*, which connects Muslims in the UK with other Muslims throughout the world.

> You feel it as a whole. Whilst it is an attack on the individual, it's actually an attack on Islam as a whole. Therefore, it has an effect on everybody. We talk very much about the *ummah*, so any part of that which is attacked is felt across the whole community. (Layla, 38 years old)

> We feel we are all under attack. When it has happened to another sister or brother it does affect me. It affects all of us.

> In our religion, we believe we are all one body. If one person is hurt, it's like a part of our body is hurt so we all have to be concerned when women in *niqabs* are at risk. (Focus group participants)

An appreciation of the concept of *ummah* and its implications has relevance for understanding the community harms of Islamophobic victimisation. In essence, the notion of *ummah* reframes the parameters of what defines national identity in Islam and reflects the development of a robust collective identity amongst the world's Muslims, which cannot be adequately explained exclusively within the framework of religious fellowship. The cumulative harms of Islamophobic victimisation can disrupt notions of safety within the Muslim community on the basis that fellow Muslims are equally vulnerable to attacks by virtue of their group membership. In

addition, the collective harms of Islamophobic victimisation reinforce the sense of alienation experienced by members of the *ummah*-based community. Consequently, the threat of Islamophobic victimisation impacts upon notions of belonging and cohesion amongst Muslims, who are reminded of the appropriate alignment of 'us' and 'them'.

More broadly still, Islamophobic victimisation affects the wider society on the basis that it isolates and excludes Muslims, thereby creating fear, resentment and mistrust of the 'Muslim other'. Similarly to racism, Islamophobic hostility is rooted in frames of inclusion and exclusion, specifying who may legitimately belong to either 'us' or 'them' whilst, at the same time, determining what each group's norms are and thereby justifying the exclusion of those whose religion and culture assign them elsewhere. From this premise, the harms associated with this victimisation create boundaries between 'us' and 'them' founded upon 'Muslim otherness'. The separation of communities based on this dichotomy has created a situation in which both Muslims and non-Muslims live in ignorance and fear of each other. This separation prevents 'us' and 'them' from interacting with each other and increases fear of engagement on both sides.

Clearly, Islamophobic victimisation promotes the notion of 'parallel lives' and self-enclosed communities. The separation between 'us' and 'them' means that each group has little or no experience of each other's daily existence. In addition, this separation infers that there is a lack of shared experiences, with little opportunity for the emergence of shared values. In theory, the notion of community cohesion highlights the importance of a common sense of belonging and the need for shared values and integration. However, this separation shows that the community cohesion agenda is based exclusively upon the obligation of Muslim minorities to integrate and, as a result, the problem of non-integration rests with Muslims themselves. Consequently, there is segregation on various levels through, for example, education, employment and recreational spheres. In addition, experience of and access to key services like health, housing and education, as well as employment opportunities, are also divided. Ultimately, the world is divided into two homogeneous groupings – 'us' and 'them' – whist failing to recognise that the wider Muslim community comprises a number of fluid, overlapping and internally diverse national, racial and ethnic communities which cut across any simple majority/minority division.

Conclusion

Based on the strict binary of 'us' and 'them', the veil is stereotypically seen as a symbol of gender oppression, Islamist terrorism and a failure to integrate. Research evidence has illustrated the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women to Islamophobic attacks in public in the UK and elsewhere post-9/11 (see, for example, Allen, Isakjee and Young 2013; Allen and Nielsen 2002; Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010; Zempi and Chakraborti 2014) but little is known about the individual and collective harms of this victimisation. Within this context, we have sought to place greater focus upon the individual, familial, community and societal implications related to the targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women. In so doing, our arguments can be condensed into four distinct, but related themes.

First, we argued that Islamophobic victimisation may damage victims' self-esteem, confidence and feelings of security far more than 'ordinary' crimes. In this regard, it is victims' intrinsic identity that is targeted, something which is central to their sense of being and which they cannot or do not wish to change. Secondly, we suggested that experiences of Islamophobic victimisation, coupled with the potential for future attacks, affect the quality of life of victims' families. In this sense, the threat of Islamophobic victimisation limits the social interactions of victims' families, thereby reinforcing their sense of isolation and persecution.

Thirdly, we argued that the emotional, psychological and behavioural impacts of Islamophobic victimisation are not restricted to victims and their families: rather, the harm extends to the wider Muslim community through notions of a worldwide, transnational Muslim community,

the *ummah*, which connects Muslims from all over world. In this sense, the individual fear and vulnerability is accompanied by the collective fear and vulnerability of all Muslims, particularly those individuals who have a 'visible' Muslim identity. Fourthly, we highlighted that the harms associated with this victimisation extend to society as a whole by exacerbating the polarisation which already exists between 'us' and 'them'. In this sense, the individual and collective harms associated with this victimisation create disruption, fear, hostility, suspicion and isolation for both 'us' and 'them'.

Increased awareness of the individual, familial, community and societal implications related to the targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women facilitate a better understanding of the micro and macro consequences of Islamophobic hostility. Based on the separation between 'us' and 'them', Islamophobia reaches into communities to create fear, hostility, and suspicion. At a point in time in which political and social constructions of belonging are framed along the lines of being either 'with us' or 'against us', the common goal to disrupt stereotypes that breed Islamophobia seems more imperative than ever. As such, it is imperative to engage with veiled Muslim women directly, rather than through gatekeepers or male community leaders who do not necessarily reflect women's views and experiences. Only by listening to their voices directly – and learning about their needs, their experiences and their expectations – can we begin to address the harmful consequences of Islamophobic victimisation.

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[1] The *niqab* is a veil covering the whole face, leaving open only a gap for the eyes.
[2] *Mahram* means a marriageable kinsperson, according to Sharia law.

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