UNVEILING ISLAMOPHOBIA:

THE VICTIMISATION OF VEILED MUSLIM WOMEN

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by

Eirini-Chrysovalantou Zempi

Department of Criminology

University of Leicester

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Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgments

Definitions of Muslim Dress

Introduction		1
Chapter One	**Perceptions of Islam, Gender and the Veil**	7
1.1	Introduction	7
1.2	Colonial understandings of the veil	7
1.3	Contemporary understandings of the veil	10
1.4	The criminalisation of the veil	19
1.5	Conclusion	24
Chapter Two	**Understanding the Multiple Meanings of the Veil**	25
2.1	Introduction	25
2.2	The visibility of the veil	25
2.3	Religious observance	28
2.4	Multiple identities	32
2.5	Veiling and fashion	34
2.6	Conclusion	35
Chapter Three	**The Significance of Islamophobic Victimisation**	37
3.1	Introduction	37
3.2	Conceptualising Islamophobia	37
3.3	Nature of Islamophobic victimisation	42
3.4	The gendered dimensions of Islamophobic victimisation	46
3.5	Islamophobic victimisation and its impact on victims	50
3.6	The community impact of Islamophobic victimisation	54
3.7	Victims' criminal justice responses	57

3.8	Identity management	60
3.9	Conclusion	63
Chapter Four	**Research Methods**	65
4.1	Introduction	65
4.2	Research aims and objectives	65
4.3	The sample	67
4.4	Employing a qualitative research framework	70
4.5	Methodology in action: individual interviews	72
4.6	Methodology in action: focus groups	73
4.7	Methodology in action: ethnography	76
4.8	Researcher subjectivities	79
4.9	Ethics	87
4.10	Conclusion	90
Chapter Five	**Constructions of the Veil**	90
5.1	Introduction	90
5.2	Reasons for wearing the veil	91
5.3	Muslim identity	104
5.4	Conclusion	107
Chapter Six	**Uncovering Islamophobic Victimisation**	110
6.1	Introduction	110
6.2	Nature of Islamophobic victimisation	111
6.3	Pattern of Islamophobic victimisation	124
6.4	Impact of Islamophobic victimisation	143
6.5	The normative aspect of Islamophobic victimisation	167
6.6	Conclusion	170

Chapter Seven	**Coping Mechanisms**	171
7.1	Introduction	171
7.2	Coping strategies	172
7.3	Support mechanisms	191
7.4	Barriers to informing the police	204
7.5	Secondary victimisation	219
7.6	Conclusion	223
Chapter Eight	**Conclusions and Implications**	225
8.1	Introduction	225
8.2	The targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women	225
8.3	Assessing the scale of the problem	229
8.4	A framework for understanding the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women	232
8.5	Moving forwards	237
List of Appendices		243
Demographics in Leicester according to the 2011 Census		244
Semi-Structured Interview and Focus Group Schedule for Veiled Muslim Women		245
Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Agency Representatives		246
Consent Form		247
Participant Information Sheet		248
Demographics Section for Veiled Muslim Women		251
References		252

Abstract

In a post-9/11 climate, Islam and Muslims are under siege. Islam is understood as a violent and backward religion and culture, Muslim men are perceived as the embodiment of terrorism and extremism, and veiled Muslim women are viewed as the personification of gender oppression. Veiled Muslim women are also seen as dangerous and threatening to notions of public safety and national cohesion by virtue of being fully covered in the public sphere. Such stereotypes mark veiled Muslim women as 'ideal' targets to attack when they are seen in public.

Drawing on qualitative data elicited through individual and focus group interviews with veiled Muslim women, individual interviews with key stakeholders and policy-makers as well as an ethnographic approach, this study sheds light on the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women as actual and potential victims of Islamophobia in public places. The study investigates the nature and impact of this victimisation upon veiled Muslim women, their families and wider Muslim communities. It also examines the factors that contribute to the under-reporting of this victimisation and outlines the coping strategies which are used by veiled Muslim women in response to their experiences of Islamophobia.

The study demonstrates that Islamophobic victimisation is understood as 'part and parcel' of wearing the veil rather than as single 'one-off' incidents, and this reflects the tendency of veiled Muslim women not to report such incidents to the police. The study also reveals how repeat incidents of supposedly 'low-level' forms of hostility such as name-calling, persistent staring and a sense of being ignored place a potentially huge emotional burden on victims. The threat of Islamophobic abuse and violence has long-lasting effects for both actual and potential victims including making them afraid to step out of their 'comfort zone'. Ultimately, the study offers a model of vulnerability of veiled Muslim women as potential victims of Islamophobia in public places based on the visibility of their Muslim identity coupled with the visibility of other aspects of their identity alongside factors such as space as well as media reports of local, national and international events related to Islam, Muslims and the veil.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory

of my beloved sister

Christine Zempi (1969 – 2001)

Definitions of Muslim Dress

Burqa is a loose outer garment that covers the entire face and body, leaving just a mesh screen to see through.

Hijab is the Arabic word for curtain or cover. It is used to describe the headscarf that covers the hair, ears, and neck, leaving the face uncovered.

Jilbab, which is also known as *abaya*, has the appearance of a long loose-fitting coat that covers the whole body except the face.

Niqab is a veil that covers a woman's hair and face, leaving only the eyes clearly visible. There are different ways of wearing the *niqab* but the great majority of the women interviewed for this thesis wore a black *jilbab* with a black *niqab* to cover their face. The *niqab* can also be worn with a separate eye veil.

Introduction

On the morning of 6 October 2009, Rehana Sidat, a 39-year old veiled Muslim woman, was walking to her work at a centre for people with learning difficulties when she was attacked in Melbourne Road, Highfields, in Leicester. She saw a white man walking towards her and, as he approached, he shouted 'Get that off' before ripping her veil from her face. After the incident, Rehana felt 'invaded' and scared to walk down the street alone. The attack had left her feeling 'naked, frightened and in shock'. She had begun to wear the veil after a period of illness had sent her on a 'search for hope and strength,' which she later found through her faith. She added that reporting the incident to the police had been a difficult decision and during the investigation and subsequent court hearing she had felt like giving up, but she had kept going to encourage other victims to come forward. Rehana described her experience in the following terms (BBC News, 2009a: n.p.):

> *To some people the removal of a veil may be a very minor thing, but for me he may as well have touched my body.*
>
> *He invaded my personal space, my privacy. It is not like touching my coat. It was as bad as him touching my body.*
>
> *That is what the veil means. It is a part of me. I have been wearing it for nearly 16 years and I feel naked without it.*

In the current climate, the visibility of the veil in public marks its wearers as particularly vulnerable to Islamophobic victimisation. The case described above exemplifies incidents whereby 'visible' Muslim women are attacked when they are seen in public. Indeed, Rehana was attacked by virtue of her Muslim identity, which was evident because she was fully veiled. The *niqab* (face covering) is the most conspicuous symbol of a practising Muslim in the West, and is key to triggering Islamophobic attacks towards Muslim women when they are seen in public places. Rehana, who subsequently took part in my own study as one of my research participants, revealed that this attack was not a single, isolated incident but rather part of a broader continuum of Islamophobia.

The wearing of the veil has come under much media, political and public scrutiny in the UK and elsewhere in the West after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7. Broadly speaking, the female Muslim dress – encompassing a variety of garments from the *hijab* (headscarf) or the *niqab* (face covering), to full body garments such as the *jilbab* – is seen as a symbol of gender oppression and the patriarchal power of religion. As such, veiled Muslim women are stereotypically perceived as oppressed and subjugated, while Islam is understood as a misogynist and patriarchal religion. To complicate matters further, the wearing of the *niqab* is not only synonymous with gender oppression but also with Islamist terrorism and a lack of integration. Collectively, these stereotypes provide the justification for Islamophobic attacks against veiled Muslim women as a means of responding to the multiple 'threats' of the veil as a symbol of gender inequality, religious fundamentalism and self-segregation.

Seen in this context, veiled Muslim women form a collective group with a single identity. This notion of a collective identity fails to take into account the differences between veiled Muslim women, for example, in terms of ethnicity, race, age, education, socio-economic status, personal histories and life experiences. From a feminist perspective, veiled Muslim women's emancipation is dependent upon the banning of the face covering in public, as is the case in certain European countries such as France, Belgium and Italy. However, this approach ignores the multiple and overlapping meanings of the veil for Muslim women who choose to wear it, and dismisses the notion of Islamic feminism, whereby veiling is an expression of agency and empowerment. Despite the subjective meanings that it holds for its wearers, the veil becomes an all-encompassing symbol of Muslim 'Otherness' and in its dominant association with Islam reinforces the perception of veiling as an essentially political, publicly oriented religious statement, thereby erasing the specificities of the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women. In this context, the veil emerges as a tool for identification upon which Islamophobia can be expressed.

However, despite the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women as actual and potential victims of Islamophobia, the nature and impact of this victimisation remains 'invisible'. As with other forms of hate crime, Islamophobic victimisation falls under the police and local authority 'radar'. The fact that it is such an under-reported phenomenon and under-researched topic infers that victims of Islamophobia often suffer in silence. Moreover, the marginalisation of veiled Muslim women as actual and potential victims of Islamophobia in media, political and public debates indicates that they are not seen as 'ideal victims' deserving of sympathy, and this contributes to the 'invisibility' of this type of victimisation.

Against this background, this thesis examines the lived experiences of Muslim women who wear the *niqab* (hereafter 'the veil') in public places in the UK and elsewhere. Through its assessment of the nature and impact of this victimisation, the research sheds light on the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women as actual and potential victims of Islamophobia. Accordingly, the aims of this study are first, to examine the nature of Islamophobic victimisation directed towards veiled Muslim women in public places; secondly, to determine the impact of this victimisation upon veiled Muslim women, their families and wider Muslim communities; thirdly, to recognise the factors that constrain or facilitate the reporting of this victimisation and fourthly, to outline the coping strategies which are used by veiled Muslim women in response to their experiences of Islamophobia.

Using the city of Leicester as the research case-study area, the study employs a variety of methods including individual and focus group interviews with veiled Muslim women, individual interviews with key stakeholders and policy-makers from local organisations, and an ethnographic approach which entails wearing the veil in public places in Leicester. The selection of Leicester arose partly through a personal awareness of the problem of Islamophobia as observed within my previous employment context as a support worker at Victim Support, Leicester. In addition, Leicester was an ideal site in which to conduct this study because of its religious, cultural and ethnic diversity coupled with the large population of Muslims and veil wearing women. This will be explored in greater depth within Chapter Four, which discusses the demographics of the research site in more detail.

Chapter One examines colonial and popular perceptions of the veil and considers the wider implications of this framework for veiled Muslim women. The chapter argues that colonial assumptions about cultural differences between Islam and the West, and the women who inhabit these spaces, are replicated in contemporary Islamophobic rhetoric. As already indicated, a common image that resides in popular perceptions about Muslim women is the image of the oppressed female body. In this context, veiled Muslim women are portrayed as victims of Islam, which reinforces stereotypical representations of the Islamic religion and culture, and privileges the culture of the West. This equation between Islam and gender subjugation is problematic as it feeds into popular stereotypes of the role of women (and men) in Islam and paves the way for Islamophobia in its current form.

Chapter Two examines the meanings of contemporary veiling from the perspective of Muslim women themselves. It indicates that popular meanings of the veil include a sense of religious piety, public modesty and protection from the male gaze. Equally importantly, the wearing of the veil is understood as a manifestation of ‘personal choice’ and 'freedom of expression’ in the context of liberal, democratic countries such as the UK. Chapter Three defines Islamophobia and explores Islamophobic victimisation through the lens of gender. It suggests that veiled Muslim women are particularly vulnerable to Islamophobic attacks in public places. In this regard, gender precipitates manifestations of Islamophobia on the basis that the visibility of the veil, coupled with popular perceptions of gender oppression in Islam, marks veiled Muslim women as ‘uniquely’ vulnerable to public manifestations of Islamophobia. Given that the Muslim identity of both actual and potential victims is self-evident because they wear the veil in public places, the notion of ‘visibility of Muslim identity’ offers a valuable insight into the process by which veiled Muslim women are identified, and subsequently subjected to Islamophobic victimisation in the public sphere. Taken together these three chapters provide a framework from which it is possible to recognise the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women in public places, and to understand the impact of manifestations of Islamophobia upon victims, their families and the wider Muslim communities.

Chapter Four presents the methodology of this study and the rationale for using qualitative interviewing and ethnography as the preferred approach. It discusses the practicalities of the research methodology, including the processes of developing an interview framework, engaging participants and analysing research material. This is followed by a discussion of the similarities and differences between the researcher and the researched, which are framed by notions of 'insider' and 'outsider' status. Chapter Five challenges the symbolism of the veil as a 'threat' to notions of gender equality, public safety and national cohesion, and illustrates the more nuanced meanings that it holds for research participants in this study. For example, the chapter indicates that the veil contains a two-fold dimension: a religious dimension and a gender-related one. From a religious perspective, the veil is understood as a symbol of religious commitment, worship and piety whilst from a gender perspective, it is seen as 'liberating' and 'empowering' because it allows women to leave the house without worrying about being judged based on their physical appearance.

Chapter Six reveals the nature of Islamophobic victimisation targeted towards veiled Muslim women. It demonstrates that experiences of Islamophobic victimisation – especially 'low-level' types of abuse – are rarely 'one-off' incidents but instead part of a broader continuum of Islamophobia experienced by veiled Muslim women on a daily basis in public places. The chapter highlights that both the fear of being attacked and incidents of Islamophobic victimisation can have significant and ongoing consequences for veiled Muslim women, their families and wider Muslim communities. Indeed, the threat of Islamophobic victimisation limits both the movements and social interactions of actual and potential victims, thus resulting in withdrawal, isolation and ultimately segregation.

Chapter Seven explores the ways in which veiled Muslim women cope with Islamophobic victimisation. It shows that there are two main, yet contrasting, levels of response – passivity and resistance. Within this paradigm, some individuals choose to ignore the abuse whilst others resist it through challenging their abusers. Related to the point of passivity, the chapter indicates that this victimisation is extensively under-reported and considers the reasons why victims are reluctant to come forward. For

example, a common reason behind participants' reluctance to report this victimisation to the police was a belief that they would fail to take it seriously. Additionally, the chapter examines the availability and effectiveness of services from the perspective of both victims and service providers. In this regard, most participants drew from informal networks of support such as family and friends rather than mainstream organisations mainly due to a lack of awareness of such services. Finally, Chapter Eight takes stock of the key themes to have emerged from the research findings, and reviews the main implications of this research. It offers a model of vulnerability of veiled Muslim women as potential victims of Islamophobia in public places, which recognises the interplay of different aspects of their 'visible' identities with other situational factors.

Chapter One
Perceptions of Islam, Gender and the Veil

1.1 Introduction

The chapter examines historical and contemporary discourses of the veil, and considers the wider implications of this framework for veiled Muslim women in the UK. In colonial times the veil was seen as a symbol of gender oppression as well as a sign of exoticism. Within this paradigm, the 'liberation' of veiled Muslim women became fused with the motivations of imperial expansion. In a post-9/11 climate, popular perceptions of the veil suggest that it is a symbol of Islamist extremism and segregation as well as a sign of gender inequality. The chapter demonstrates that the veil has been – and continues to be – perceived as a symbol of Muslim 'otherness' and its visibility is key to constructing stereotypes which identify it as a marker of Muslim 'difference'. The chapter also offers a discussion of legal restrictions upon the wearing of the veil in public places in Europe, and argues that perceptions of veiled Muslim women as either oppressed or acting on behalf of a 'terrorist religion' potentially legitimise public acts of violence towards veiled Muslim women. Even if not explicitly inciting hate-motivated violence, popular stereotypes contribute to a climate of intolerance towards veiled Muslim women and to mounting tensions between Islam and the West.

1.2 Colonial understandings of the veil

Historically and traditionally, Western contact with veiled Muslim women was rare before colonial exploration. Prior to the 17th century, colonial perceptions of veiled Muslim women were the product of male travellers' tales and poor translations of Arabic texts (Ahmed, 1992). From the late 17th century, colonial interaction with veiled Muslim women remained limited until the next century when colonial expansion began to produce a 'Western narrative of women in Islam' (Ahmed, 1992: 149). In 1978, Said coined the term 'Orientalism' to portray the way that Western scholarship reflected a distorted image of the East. In particular, the 'Orientalist framework' stemmed from 'an imaginative and yet drastically polarized geography dividing the

world into two unequal parts, the larger, ‘different’ one called the Orient, the other, also known as ‘our’ world, called the Occident or the West’ (Said, 1981: 4). This imaginative geography was characterised by the strict binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’ whereby the West was privileged over the Orient. The ideology associated with Orientalism served to construct a Western identity based on opposition to the Orient. From this perspective, the production of knowledge about the colonial ‘Other’ was a simultaneous constitution of the ‘Self’. This framework was also employed in relation to the dress code of women in Islam.

Within the Orientalist framework, the veiled female body became *the* symbol for Islam. Essentially, the wearing of the veil was seen as evidence of the subjugation of women in Islam based on the premise that women were forced to wear the veil by Muslim men. As such, the veil became the symbol of the backwardness of Islam itself. Al-Saji (2010) argues that colonisation functions not only through economic and political hegemony but also by means of a representational apparatus which determines perceptions of the colonised. This apparatus of representation is the lens through which the colonial observer views the colonised society. At the same time though, this lens is also a mirror. The representational apparatus of colonialism not only constitutes the image of the ‘native’ but posits this image in opposition to a certain self-perception of colonial society.

As Bradford (1999) notes, the production of knowledge about the colonial ‘Other’ was a simultaneous constitution of the ‘Self’. Correspondingly, the veiled female body was projected as the counter image for the ‘ideal’ Western woman, particularly in the context of gender equality. Within this framework, the ‘liberation’ of veiled Muslim women became *the* justification for colonialism. During the late 19th and early 20th century colonial officials adopted a ‘civilising mission’ in relation to colonised countries (Bradford, 1999). The veil took on an acute visibility in this attempt, with the image of the subjugated Muslim woman in need of rescue by Western men being used to legitimise the build-up of French and British colonial empires.

At a time when Victorian morals predominated, Muslim women were the objects of male erotic fantasies related to the idea of *harem*[1]. An eroticised desire to remove the veil was evident in the growing European print culture of the 18th century. Mabro's (1991) study of Western travellers' perceptions of Middle Eastern women found that they were seen as 'exotic' and the veil was placed at the centre of this exoticism. Seen in this light, the veil represented the 'ancient, the mysterious, and romance itself' (Nussbaum, 1995: 123). For Mabro (1991), a desire to 'uncover what was covered' and to 'see the unseen' was a constant feature within colonial discourses, thus pointing to a libidinal desire to unveil the veiled female body. The same image was evident in Orientalist paintings in which women were frequently portrayed naked or scantily clad lounging in *harems* (Haddad, 2007). However, it was also argued that these women were unhappy in their *harem* and thus in need of rescue by the West (Kahf, 1999). Clearly, such paintings presented a sharp contrast between the civility of the West and the barbarity of the East, between 'us' and 'them'. Vulnerable, naked women who needed to be rescued by Western men were presented as the victims of cruel Eastern men. It is this image of captive beauty that appealed to the patriarchal urges of domination and imperialism of Western men.

It is important to note that Western men were prohibited from entering the private world, including *harems*, where unveiled women could be viewed and as a result, the removal of the veil signified the ultimate form of colonisation. In this regard, the objectification of the veil as a form of visibility of sexual desire to unveil the veiled female body became fused with the motivations of imperial expansion. The visible transformation from veiled bodies to 'Westernised' bodies was a key factor in subduing resistance towards colonial powers through imposing 'Western values' upon them. Billaud and Castro (2013) observe that the removal of all distinctive signs and especially the veil from the public domain was key to the assimilation of the colonised. Ultimately, removing women's veils became a central motive of the so-called 'civilising mission' on the basis that the veil was seen as a 'visible' barrier to the establishment of Western superiority.

[1] The *harem* was the space in which veiled Muslim women could be uncovered.

This discussion demonstrates that in colonial times the veil was invested with a twofold visibility of desire: a sexual desire to see beneath the veil in parallel with a desire to 'civilise' and 'modernise' Muslim women by removing their veils. From this perspective, the veil was seen as a symbol of gender oppression in Islam as well as a sign of exoticism, whilst the 'liberation' of veiled Muslim women became fused with the motivations of imperial expansion, at least from the gaze of the coloniser. This approach of viewing veiled Muslim women as subjects who can and should be unveiled functions as a contemporary precedent for the state's desire to remove the veil in public places and to 'see the unseen'. This indicates that colonial ways of seeing the veil still function as a lens through which to view veiled Muslim women, particularly in certain European countries such as France, Belgium and Italy where the wearing of the veil has been banned in public.

1.3 Contemporary understandings of the veil

In colonial times the image of the subjugated veiled Muslim woman in need of rescue by Western men dominated the gaze of the colonisers. In a post-9/11 climate, popular perceptions of the veil suggest that it is a symbol of Islamist extremism and self-segregation as well as a sign of gender oppression. Such negative connotations of the veil interact with each other whilst promoting the veil as a 'threat' *per se* in the West. Although there is an overlap amongst these misconceptions of the veil it is necessary to assess them separately, particularly since they promote Islamophobia in different ways. As the following discussion demonstrates, the wearing of the veil attracts negative attention premised on three main arguments: gender equality, public safety and integration.

1.3.1 Gender oppression

The wearing of the veil in public places in the West is routinely perceived as a symbol of female subordination. As a marker of patriarchy, the veil represents the subjugation of women in Islam on the basis that they are coerced into wearing it by Muslim men (Mancini, 2013). From this perspective, the female code of dress in Islam functions as a metonym for the perceived backwardness of Islam itself. The assumption of patriarchal

domination and matriarchal submissiveness in Islam consolidates and re-produces oriental views of Islam as culturally inferior to the West. Based on the rigid dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’, the act of veiling is constructed as evidence of the misogyny and violence associated with Islam whilst the act of unveiling is identified as an example of the equation of the West with gender equality and freedom (Klaus and Kassel, 2005). As such, the veil is understood as a symbol for the oppression of women against which the West prides itself as being emancipator (Klaus and Kassel, 2005).

Within this paradigm, popular stereotypes about women in Islam provide the negative mirror in which Western constructions of gender can be positively reflected. By erasing the multiplicity and variety of veiled Muslim women’s lived experiences, they are constructed as ‘Other’ compared to Western women. In striking contrast to the image of the oppressed veiled Muslim woman stands the image of the emancipated Western (and non-Muslim) woman who has ‘control over her income, her body and her sexuality’ (Kapur, 2002: 16). From this perspective, the reduction of images of Muslim women to monolithic categories maintains the construction of the Muslim as ‘Other’ whereby Muslim women are underprivileged and oppressed, ‘with the West being the primary referent in theory and praxis’ (Raju, 2002: 173).

Critique of veiling practices located on the ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy infers that the increasing visibility of veiled female bodies in the public sphere indicates ‘Muslimness’ rather than femininity. This approach is based on a simplistic equation between sexual expressiveness and bodily display. As Macdonald (2006) points out, Western imagination is itself obsessed with bodies and the possibility of revealing the female body. Popular images of women on television screens, in magazines and on billboards promote a ‘natural,’ ‘open’ and ‘unveiled’ female body which is constructed through regimes of internalised management such as diet, exercise and even plastic surgery, whilst promoting the open visibility of glamorous, white, youthful, female bodies. In striking contrast to this image stands the image of the veiled Muslim woman who is perceived to be sexually constrained, illiterate, tradition-bound, domesticated and poor. In the words of Kapur (2002: 18), ‘it is an image that is strikingly reminiscent of the colonial construction of the

Eastern woman'. This approach is structured along the contours of colonial reasoning: the assumption being that women in Islam are incapable of self-determination and autonomy. Seen in this light, a body that is veiled is necessarily a 'victimised' body to the extent that veiled Muslim women are incapable of autonomy or agency. Despite the fact that Muslim women assert their desire to veil as an expression of freedom, independence or religious identity 'their articulations are read through a solipsistic prism that obstructs all other epistemological standpoints' (Fernandez, 2009: 275-276).

In concretising the symbolism of the veil as a form of gender oppression, anti-veiling discourse denies the voices of women while professing a desire for their voices to be heard. Although the veil debate revolves around the right to freedom of speech and expression, the views of veiled Muslim women are not heard, and the symbol of the veil itself is presented as 'clear' and in no need of interpretation or explanation. Consequently, the multiple meanings of the veil are taken to be self-evident, as representing the subordination of women in Islam, whilst the voices of veiled Muslim women are almost entirely missing from the public sphere. Ultimately, the multiple meanings of veiling as an expression of religion, personal autonomy and freedom of expression are overlooked. Without ignoring the fact that some women, Muslim or not, are oppressed by men and by customs, this is not the appropriate framework in which to explore veiling, particularly in liberal democratic states such as the UK.

There is a view within feminist discourse that wearing the veil can be problematic. In this regard, feminists might have a problem with the veil on the basis that veiling is seen as culturally and religiously imposed, and as a result the notion of 'real' choice is extremely limited within this context. More generally, there are concerns within the feminist movement about the issue of 'choice' of all women. Some of these concerns relate to the argument that women should be liberated from any constraints of representation, whether it refers to covering up or not covering. This infers that women do have choices, but these are essentially meted out within a patriarchal and gendered society that mediates the choices that women make. Accordingly, patriarchy determines the choices that Muslim women have in relation to covering. From this perspective, concerns about gender oppression in Islam

are legitimate since all religions, including Christianity, can act in similarly oppressive ways. However, as will be shown in some detail within this thesis, these concerns are not legitimate concerns for the sample of Muslim women that I spoke to. Throughout individual interviews and focus group discussions, the veiled Muslim women who took part in this study saw themselves as agents who made a genuine decision to wear the veil.

On the one hand, women in certain Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia are forced to wear the veil and this can be a very traumatic experience. On the other hand, veiling in a liberal democratic country such as the UK (where veiling is voluntary) indicates that veiling is a choice, particularly as a symbol of Muslim identity (although this is not always the case as there may be Muslim girls and women who are 'made' to wear it). However, a key theme emerging from the existing research literature is that veiling represents freedom of choice within the UK (Bullock, 2011; Franks, 2000; Hannan, 2011; Mondal, 2008; Tarlo, 2007). Echoing the same view, Ferrari (2013) states that interpreting the veil exclusively as a marker of gender oppression neglects the fact that there are women who choose to wear the veil but according to Billaud and Castro (2013) the apparently autonomous decision to wear the veil is the result of a false consciousness rather than a genuine choice. This means that veiled Muslim women are not simply oppressed but they are also 'blind' to their own oppression.

Ultimately, the failure to acknowledge the possibility of the autonomy of veiled Muslim women ensures the continued representation of women in Islam as 'voiceless victims'. Moreover, dominant perceptions about veiled Muslim women's lack of agency further entrench dangerous notions of a 'Muslim problem' whereby Muslim men deny Muslim women the freedom to exercise their autonomy. As Ahmad (2010) notes, this discourse silences and obscures alternative forms of agency, repeats simplistic 'Western' versus 'Muslim' dichotomous frameworks, and contributes to the separation between 'us' and 'them'. While acknowledging that the social status and life conditions of many Muslim women need to be improved to achieve gender equality, it should also be recognised that to consider *all* Muslim women as passive victims is not an accurate reflection of how many Muslim women perceive their lives. Rather, the articulation of the female Muslim body as the 'victim

subject' fails to accommodate a multi-layered experience and therefore, denies the possibility of genuine choice.

1.3.2 Islamist terrorism

The wearing of the veil in public places in the West is stereotypically seen as a symbol of Islamist fundamentalism. In a post-9/11 climate, the West is allegedly facing a global 'threat' by Islamist extremism and the veil is a visual representation of that 'threat'. Ghumman and Ryan (2013) argue that although Muslim women are perceived as oppressed and Muslim men are seen as dangerous, Muslim women are not free from popular stereotypes whereby Muslims *per se* are seen as terrorists or terrorist sympathisers. In particular, the veil is perceived as a danger to public safety on the basis that the covering of the face hinders identification and as such it could be used as camouflage for a terrorist.

An example of the link between the veil and Islamist terrorism is evident in several high profile cases in the British context. In December 2006 Mustaf Jama, a Somali asylum seeker wanted for the murder of a British female police officer, fled the UK dressed in *burka* and using his sister's passport, despite being amongst the UK's most wanted criminals at the time and Heathrow airport being in a state of alert following the 7/7 bombings (Stokes, 2006). Moreover, one of the terrorists responsible for the 7/7 bombings had allegedly fled London disguised in veil (BBC News, 2007). In November 2013 terror suspect Mohammed Ahmed Mohammed escaped surveillance in London by entering a mosque wearing Western clothes but leaving the mosque disguised as a veiled woman (Guardian, 2013a).

As mentioned above, the veil is stereotypically seen as a danger to public safety based on the premise that it could be used as camouflage for a terrorist. In this light, banning the veil is often seen as the only way to ensure public safety. It is important to note that there is no veil ban in the UK but schools and educational institutions are allowed to set their own uniform guidelines. In 2005 Imperial College in London banned its students from wearing the veil on campus over security concerns raised by the terrorist attacks of 7/7 (Garner, 2005). In 2006 Birmingham University School of Medicine banned its medical students from wearing the veil when talking to

patients in hospitals and surgeries, and when they were in meetings with other medical staff (Leggatt, Dixon and Milland, 2006). In September 2013 Birmingham Metropolitan College banned its students from wearing the veil on campus so that they were easily identifiable.

The British Prime Minister, David Cameron, supported this decision but the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, stated that he was uneasy about the veil ban (Mason, 2013). In 2010 Damian Green, then immigration minister, stated that banning the veil in this country would be 'un-British' (BBC News, 2010). Birmingham Metropolitan College has now reversed its decision after more than 9,000 people signed an online petition set up by the NUS Black Students' Campaign calling on the College to remove the ban (Guardian, 2013b). As Malik (2008: 99) points out, one must guard against 'the dangers of conflating religious differences with national security risks'. The fact that the wearing of the veil might be used by certain individuals to commit crime or even for the purposes of terrorism is not a legitimate reason for banning it. As will be discussed in due course, legislation which bans the wearing of the veil constitutes a human rights violation and also undercuts individual agency, privacy and self-expression no less than in countries where women are forced to veil.

As a sign of Islamist terrorism and extremism, the veil is also understood as a tool of religious fundamentalism whereby it serves to proselytise non-Muslims to Islam. In this regard, the veil is seen as an act of religious propaganda with the aim to infiltrate into Western society. In the words of Tissot (2011: 43), 'Women in *niqab* are the Trojan horse of extremist Islamism'. Seen in this light, the veil hides not only the face but 'secret intentions' as well, namely, to impose Sharia law in the West. As such, the veil represents the type of political Islamism that is also found in Iraq and Afganistan, characterising the implementation of Sharia law as interpreted by the Taliban. As Chapter Two notes, the Muslim veil signals a 'new' identity but this identity is not necessarily 'fundamentalist', 'Islamist' or 'radical' as the meanings of the veil vary significantly according to the context and social actors involved. However, Muslim girls and women who veil in the UK are stereotypically linked to political Islam.

In 2002 Shabina Begum, aged 15 at the time, pursued a legal case against Denbigh High School in Luton on the grounds that it had unlawfully denied her the 'right to education and to manifest her religious beliefs' for its ban on the *jilbab*, a traditional Islamic dress that leaves only the hands and face exposed (Johnston, 2005). The then head teacher at Denbigh High School in Luton stated that the school maintained its *jilbab* ban to help students to resist the efforts of extremist Muslim groups to recruit them (Johnston, 2005). It was believed that after her parents died, Begum came under influence of her brother, a supporter of the Islamic political party, *Hizb ut-Tahrir*. For *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and its members, the Muslim dress is a flag for Islam, designed not only to display the Muslim woman's rejection of Western capitalism, secularism and integration, but also to draw infidels towards submission to *Allah* (Tarlo, 2007). The High Court dismissed Begum's application for judicial review, ruling that she had failed to show that the school, where 79 per cent of pupils were Muslim, had either excluded her or breached her human rights (Halpin, 2005). This was overturned by the Court of Appeal, which stated that the school had unlawfully excluded Begum, denied her the right to manifest her religion, and denied her access to suitable and appropriate education (Johnston, 2005). Begum stated:

> *The decision of Denbigh High School to prevent my adherence to my religion cannot unfortunately be viewed as merely a local decision taken in isolation. Rather it was a consequence of an atmosphere that has been created in Western societies post 9/11, an atmosphere in which Islam has been made a target for vilification in the name of the 'War on Terror'* (Johnston, 2005: n.p.).

At the stroke of a pen, schoolgirls who veil are linked to Islamist terrorism and the subjugation of women in Islam (Brown, 2001). Embedded in such statements is the underlying assumption that Muslim girls and women who veil do so from within frameworks of coercive constraint. As Fernandez (2009) observes, one of the key concerns in the Begum case was whether the applicant's decision to wear the *jilbab* was made entirely freely or whether

she had been subject to pressure from her brother. Such assumptions of a coercive element ignore the possibility of free choice whilst, at the same time, denying the reality of a legal framework that promotes a permissive understanding of adolescent autonomy (Fernandez, 2009).

1.3.3 National cohesion

The wearing of the veil in public places in the West is routinely understood as a marker of segregation. Seen in this light, the wearing of the veil mirrors the notion of 'parallel lives' (Cantle, 2001) and self-enclosed communities. Also, it hinders integration and fosters the social isolation of veiled Muslim women. Within this paradigm, multiculturalism is seen as a 'threat' to the existence of Western values and the veil – by virtue of its public visibility as the sign of Islam in the West – is a visual symbol of that 'threat' (Meer, Dwyer and Modood, 2010). In the British context, national identity and examples of Muslim 'difference' are cast as mutually exclusive. As such, the veil is rejected on the grounds that it is non-British in inception and adoption, thereby erasing the principle of integration as a two-way process of mutual accommodation by all; rather, it is integration at the price of becoming less 'Muslim' (Meer *et al*., 2010). Thus, the argument goes, veiled Muslim women must remove their veils in order to integrate into Western society.

The rhetoric of the veil as a 'statement of separation and of difference'[2], was maintained by Kettle (2006: n.p.) who stated that it is 'not merely a badge of religious or cultural identity like a turban, a yarmulke or even a baseball cap'; rather, it indicates rejection. In this sense, the veil is seen as 'different' to other forms of religious attire – including other Muslim forms. Rather, the wearing of the veil signals a visibility that is 'conspicuous' in comparison to other religious signs, which themselves do not attract public attention and, though also visible, remain 'normalised'. As such, the veil is 'unique' on the basis that it prevents a basic form of human contact in a way

[2] In 2006 the comments of Jack Straw, then British Home Secretary, attracted considerable publicity when he stated that the veil is a 'visible statement of separation and of difference', and that it can weaken community relations. Straw's statement of the veil as a sign of difference and segregation were publicly supported by Tony Blair, then British Prime Minister, and other leading Labour politicians including Ruth Kelly, then Communities Secretary, who 'recognised' the dangers of promoting cultural and religious 'difference' in the UK at the expense of national cohesion (Tweedie, 2006). In light of these remarks, the removal of the veil became crucial to the goal of community cohesion in the UK.

that the Muslim headscarf, the Sikh turban, the Buddhist robe and the Christian Cross do not. Unlike other examples of religious attire that allow for the face to be visible, the veil allegedly cancels the wearer's identity. According to this line of argument, the veil relegates the wearer to a condition of isolation and segregation due to the perceived difficulty in communicating with a person whose face is covered. From this perspective, the veil is seen as hindrance to direct communication because it makes inter-personal communication less open and transparent. Robert (2005: 28) states:

> *It is as if, once you put on the niqab you cease to have a human identity. I know that the niqab is a shock to the system for most people in non-Muslim societies – we are used to seeing so much personal information about people around us, being able to tell their race, their age, their physique and their attractiveness. The niqab gives none of this information.*

Echoing the same view, Mancini (2013: 27) argues that a covered face cancels transparency and reciprocity in communication, highlighting 'the objective and undeniable difficulty of communication that derives from the almost total covering of a woman's face'. Seen in this light, transparency and reciprocity is impeded by the covering of the face with the veil. Along similar lines, Tourkohoriti (2012) observes that in Christianity the face has become the 'quintessence of the person', the 'noble part of the body', whilst the covering of the face marks an 'undignified' existence. According to this line of argument, the veil is contrary to contemporary Christian/Western societies, which value the face and in which interactions among citizens are necessarily unveiled. Clearly, the fact that veiling has historically formed part of Christian traditions is ignored.

This discussion shows that the wearing of the veil is routinely seen as an obstacle to face-to-face interaction and thus as a sign of social isolation and self-segregation. It would appear then that the community cohesion agenda is based exclusively upon the obligation of Muslim minorities for integration, and as a result the problem of non-integration rests with Muslims themselves (Meer *et al*., 2010). The concept of integration does not allow for

‘difference’ in general and ‘Muslim distinctiveness’ in particular; rather, ‘real’ integration can only be achieved through greater public conformity in sharp contrast to a multicultural integration that sustains ‘difference’. From this perspective, the removal of the veil is an essential step to community cohesion on the basis that the covering of the face is a visible barrier to community relations.

Indeed, the practice of veiling has acquired huge significance in the discourse on Muslim integration. Muslim women are viewed as the main vehicles of integration but simultaneously they are the first victims of the failure of integration. Ironically, choosing to veil is a greater offence than being forced to veil, or as Khiabany and Williamson (2008: 69) put it: ‘Veiled women are considered to be ungrateful subjects who have failed to assimilate and are deemed to threaten the British way of life’. Even in cases where women choose to wear the veil, they are seen as deliberately isolating themselves and rejecting Western values. Ultimately, the parameters of the veil debate demonstrate that multiculturalism is an implicit expression of the degree of tolerance of the ‘host’ state that demands the integration of the Muslim ‘Other’ on its own terms. Such stereotypes are key to the criminalisation of the veil in public places in the West.

1.4 The criminalisation of the veil

The preceding discussion illustrates popular stereotypes of the veil as a visible marker of gender oppression, Islamist terrorism and self-segregation. In light of this, the practice of veiling represents an unacceptable ‘otherness’, an unwelcome religious, cultural and racial presence (Grillo and Shah, 2012). The ubiquitous assumption that the veil accentuates Muslim ‘Otherness’ *vis-à-vis* Western values paints the veil as ‘dangerous’ whilst ignoring its multi-layered symbolism. Despite its multiple meanings as a sign of religious freedom and personal expression, popular understandings of the veil indicate that veiled Muslim women are either oppressed or acting on behalf of a ‘terrorist religion’.

Correspondingly, several European countries have enforced legislation which makes it illegal for Muslim women to wear the veil in public. In 2011 France became the first country in Europe to introduce a law banning the

wearing of the veil in public places.[3] It is important to note that in 2004 France enacted a law banning the *hijab* for students in public schools.[4] In particular, the legislation prohibited the display of 'conspicuous' religious symbols such as the Jewish skullcap, the Christian crucifix and the Sikh turban by the students of public elementary and high schools. According to Lyon and Spini (2004), this law appeared to deal with religious symbols *per se*, although the public debate was mostly concerned with the Muslim headscarf.

Belgium was the second European country after France to enforce a veil ban. Following the example set by France and Belgium, the Dutch government has agreed to introduce a ban on face covering in public. In Italy, a parliamentary commission has approved a draft law banning women from wearing veils in public whilst an old anti-terrorist law against concealing the face for security reasons has already been used by some local Italian authorities to fine Muslim women who wear the veil. In Spain, the city of Barcelona has announced a veil ban in some public spaces such as municipal offices, public markets and libraries, whilst at least two smaller towns in Catalonia have already imposed veil bans. Grillo and Shah (2012) point out that while local in origin, policies to ban the veil are usually followed by other countries. As such, there exists a cross-national interweaving of media, political and public discourses against the 'Islamisation' of Europe and in favour of restrictions on the practice of Islam in the West. The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (2010: n.p.) legitimises the veil ban on the basis that the wearing of the *niqab* is seen as a 'threat' to gender equality, public safety and national cohesion.

> *The veiling of women, especially full veiling through the burqa or the niqab, is often perceived as a symbol of the subjugation of women to men, restricting the role of women within society, limiting their professional life and impeding their social and economic activities ... Article 9 of the Convention includes the right of individuals to choose freely to wear or not to wear religious clothing*

[3] French law number 2010–1192 of 11 October 2010.
[4] French law number 2004–228 of 15 March 2004.

> *in private or in public. Legal restrictions to this freedom may be justified where necessary in a democratic society, in particular for security purposes or where public or professional functions of individuals require their religious neutrality or that their face can be seen.*

Although it acknowledges that Muslim women have the right to freedom of religious expression, the Council of Europe justifies the implementation of legal restrictions upon the wearing of the veil in public in Europe. Indeed, justifications in favour of the veil ban in public generally take three forms: covering the face is incompatible with Western values including gender equality; wearing the veil impedes communication and integration; and wearing the veil poses a security risk. Moreover, France is a secular country and as a result, religious practices such as veiling are seen as 'unacceptable'. At face value, while it seems to be a policy that embraces secularism (religious neutrality), the French veil ban has directly negative consequences for veiled Muslim women because it suggests that veiling is contrary to secularism. As such, the veil ban demonises Islam, women and the veil despite the fact that for veiled Muslim women who choose to wear it, it is a pivotal part of their faith. Policies related to secularism are often introduced for valid reasons that are in line with particular cultural freedoms within a nation but, perhaps inadvertently, those kinds of secularist policies can demonise those who, whether out of choice (or not), do not adhere to those kinds of principles.

The British government has not entertained a veil ban so far. In this regard, there are no legislative or administrative provisions which forbid the wearing of the veil at the national or local level. Contrary to France, the UK does not have a tradition of secularism; rather, its patrimony lies in an established state church which affords liberal tolerance to those of all religious persuasions or none (Hill, 2013). However, although the UK does not have any legislative prohibitions in place, there are calls for such legislation to be introduced. In 2010, the Conservative MP Philip Hollobone sought to introduce a Private Members' Bill, entitled the Face Coverings Regulations Bill, which would make it illegal for people to cover their faces in

public. The Bill, which received its second reading in the House of Commons in December 2011, was rejected. The British National Party and the UK Independence Party both supported a veil ban in their election manifestos in 2010, while extreme protest movements such as the English Defence League have staged a number of violent anti-Muslim protests against elements of Islam namely Sharia law, mosques and the Muslim veil.

Although there is no official policy on the Muslim code of dress in the UK, there has been considerable debate. After Birmingham Metropolitan College dropped a ban on students wearing veils, British Home Office minister Jeremy Browne stated that the government should consider banning Muslim girls from wearing veils in public places and asked for a national debate to take place (BBC News, 2013a). In a similar vein, Conservative MP Sarah Wollaston stated that the veil makes its wearers 'invisible' and prevents women from 'participating fully and equally in society' (BBC News, 2013a: n.p.). A recent poll by Channel 4 News (2013) showed that 55 per cent of the public supported a veil ban in all public places whilst 81 per cent supported a veil ban in schools, courts and hospitals. Additionally, two recent YouGov[5] (2013) polls showed strong levels of opposition towards the *niqab*, although more tolerance of the *hijab* as a more 'acceptable' form of Muslim dress in comparison to the *niqab*.

Against this background, the context in which the debate about the 'appropriateness' of the veil takes place, within the UK and elsewhere, tends to be that of Huntington's thesis of civilisational clash. Huntington's (1997) 'class of civilisations' theory posits that Islam and the West are two monoliths that are 'at war' with each other. Under this idea, the 'West' offers equality, rights, liberties and tolerance whilst 'Islam' offers gender oppression, subordination and violence. Within this paradigm, the figure of the veiled female body becomes a central point in the battle between the West and the Muslim 'Other', whilst defying the specificities of the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women. By the veiling and unveiling of Muslim women, Islam is illustrated, interpreted and marked as a completely 'different' world whereby the veil signifies the border between Islam and the West. Contemporary

[5] YouGov is a research company which is based in the UK.

stereotypes of the veil play a central role in this imaginary construct, ‘‘underwriting the binary of freedom and oppression and the modes of gender and subjectivity through which the ‘West’ maintains its imaginary borders’’ (Al-Saji, 2010: 878).

Tourkohoriti (2012) points out that the veil ban, like the *hijab* ban in public schools in France, is justified by the need to protect Muslim girls and women from being forced to wear it by their families or local community. It also aims to protect them from themselves when wearing the veil happens to be an authentic choice of the women concerned. In this regard, Muslim women are denied the possibility to be active agents capable of rational choices because they are considered to be alienated and ‘blind’ to their own oppression. Although religions in general may provide the means and justification for the subjection of women, a distorted view of Islam denies recognition of Muslim women’s autonomy.

Clearly, the veil debate has not translated into a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which veiled Muslim women’s lived experiences are mediated by factors such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, education, socio-economic status and space, to name but some. Rather, the gradual mutation of the veil from a symbol of religious identity to a contentious marker of ‘difference’ paves the way for further contamination of the veil as a visible sign of Muslim ‘otherness’. Ultimately, the veil ban – including support for state veil bans – prevents veiled Muslim women from full participation in society by exacerbating their multiple and intersectional discrimination on the grounds of both religion and gender, thereby increasing (rather than decreasing) social exclusion by pushing these women to the margins of society.

The law also stigmatises veiled Muslim women as ‘criminals’, thereby potentially ‘legitimising’ acts of violence towards them when they are seen in public. In this sense, the law increases the sense of vulnerability of veiled Muslim women in the public sphere. Even if not explicitly inciting hate-motivated violence, the law in its application contributes to a climate of intolerance and to mounting tensions between Islam and the West (see also Chakraborti and Zempi, 2013). Ferrari (2013) highlights that criminal law is not the best instrument for dealing with the problems raised by covering

one's face; rather, in a genuinely liberal society criminal law should be the last resort for when it is not possible to protect people's rights. Other instruments such as education and debate should be implemented to promote an open discussion within the Muslim community on the role of the veil in the public sphere in the West and elsewhere.

1.5 Conclusion

The preceding discussion has shown that the veil has become an important symbol in the homogenisation and demonisation of Islam and Muslims. This has become all the more evident in the context of intense political, media and public scrutiny over the visibility of Islam in the West in relation to broader concerns about issues of gender inequality, terrorism and segregation. The chapter explored popular perceptions of the veil as a symbol of gender oppression, Islamist extremism and a lack of integration, and suggested that the significance of veiling practices is often ignored. In this regard, both historical and contemporary constructions of the veil ignore the specificities of Muslim women's lived experiences. Moreover, perceptions of veiled Muslim women as either oppressed or acting on behalf of a 'terrorist religion' potentially legitimise public manifestations of Islamophobia. Correspondingly, policies that restrict the wearing of the veil in public places potentially legitimise the acts of violence and hostility directed towards veiled Muslim women when they are seen in public. Chapter Two seeks to challenge popular misunderstandings of the wearing of the veil. It reveals the diverse, complex and overlapping meanings behind the veiling practices of Muslim girls and women in the West. This context is crucial to understanding the impact of Islamophobic victimisation upon veiled Muslim women, their families and wider Muslim communities.

Chapter Two
Understanding the Multiple Meanings of the Veil

2.1 Introduction

As has been previously discussed, post-9/11 the wearing of the veil in the West is stereotypically seen as a visible 'threat' to gender equality, public safety and national cohesion. Against this background, the chapter explores the meanings of contemporary veiling from the perspective of its wearers. Through the course of this discussion, evidence suggests that the significance of veiling is systematically overlooked. The literature routinely debates the degree of liberation or oppression of veiled Muslim women whilst ignoring that veiling is neither exclusively liberating nor oppressive; rather, the power relations invested in the practice of veiling are contextual and situational. The chapter discusses the veil as a symbol of Islam but perhaps more importantly, interprets the veil and its wearer outside the framework of Muslim identity. It will be concluded that separating the wearing of the veil from its wider socio-political and cultural context portrays religion as an overly deterministic feature in Muslim women's lives and as such it contributes to the pervading stereotypes of Islam and Muslims.

2.2 The visibility of the veil

Understanding the meanings of the veil from the perspective of Muslim women necessitates distinguishing between veiling in a liberal democratic country such as the UK (where veiling is voluntary from the State's point of view) and in an Islamic State (where it is mandatory) or in a situation where wearing the veil is banned in public, as has been the case recently in France, Belgium and Italy. Within this paradigm, Lyon and Spini (2004) argue that the veil is the most conspicuous sign of Islamic feminism in the West based on the premise that the wearing of the veil is not imposed by Muslim men or by the State but chosen by Muslim women themselves. Correspondingly, evidence suggests that veiling represents freedom of choice within the UK (Bullock, 2011; Franks, 2000; Hannan, 2011; Mondal, 2008; Tarlo, 2007). Under this idea, Muslim women choose to wear the *hijab, jilbab* or *niqab* as

an expression of their religious commitment to *Allah* and for the benefits and advantages – perceived or experienced – which come from wearing it, namely, public modesty as well as a sense of protection from the male gaze.

It is important to recognise that the veil does not attract public attention in an Islamic state where the majority of women wear it but it does attract attention in countries where veiling is a rare practice. As Ferrari (2013) points out, wearing the veil in the West attracts public attention instead of passing 'unobserved'. From this perspective, the veil puts Muslim women in the spotlight because they 'stand out' from the crowd since they are fully veiled. Clearly, this is the case in the public sphere in the UK and elsewhere in the West, where the veil monopolises the image of Islam whilst hiding the very existence of Muslim women not wearing it. Consequently, the visibility and invisibility of the female body becomes central in promoting the veil as a symbol of Muslim 'otherness'. In other words, the wearing of the veil emphasises the 'difference' between the veiled and the non-veiled woman.

Western discourses require female sexual agency and desire to be inscribed in the openness to view the female body. Thus, the argument goes, the more 'liberated' a woman, the more 'civilised' the society. Although it regards itself as liberal, the West requires women to have particular experiences and to define themselves in certain ways; rather, 'most of all it requires that women be the object of the gaze' (Franks, 2000: 927). This argument draws its concept of the 'gaze' from the panoptic gaze that Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish* (1977). This point is crucial to understanding the concept of visibility in the discussion of the veil. Franks (2000) presents a development of this line of argument which recognises that there is a hierarchy of gazes, which changes according to location. Within this framework, the Muslim woman who veils becomes the object of the gaze in a non-Muslim milieu such as the UK. As such, the praxis of veiling in the UK has the 'unintended consequence' of attracting the non-Muslim gaze.

As noted in Chapter One, essentialised perceptions of veiled Muslim women as docile, oppressed and 'hidden' behind their veils are products of a colonial mode of construction and representation. This androcentric gaze – or to use Frye's (1983) term 'arrogant vision' – sees the female body as an object of male desire whilst defining her subject-position through that gaze.

Representations of veiled Muslim women as symbols of gender oppression are generated by such vision, specifically by a gaze that 'wants to see'. Al-Saji (2010) argues that vision is not a mere neutral recording of the visible. In Foucault's terms, the concept of the 'object of the gaze' operates upon the assumption of an 'ideal' spectator. This approach promotes a particular way of seeing and of being seen. Foucault's theoretical framework ascribes control over the gaze to the 'ideal spectator' to critique the images created through that gaze. In this context, the veil constitutes a form of visibility of desire; a desire to remove the veil and view the unseen. According to Yegenoglu (1998: 12), the desire to penetrate behind the veil is 'characterised by a desire to master, control, and reshape the body of the subjects by making them visible'. The veil with its rich connotations marks the foe, whilst the aim of unveiling the veiled female Muslim body provides justification for radical action (Klaus and Kassel, 2005). Accordingly, the veil constitutes an obstacle to desire to see behind the veil and as a result it emerges as an object of frustration and aggressiveness. Following this line of thought, Muslim women may be targeted because they 'stand out' from accepted norms and as such, they fail to conform to society's expectations of sexual behaviour and gender performance. Ultimately, the symbol of the unveiled female Muslim body becomes a sign of 'victory'.

Within the framework of a theory of the gaze the options of resistance left to the objectified are constructed within a binary opposition. This means that veiled Muslim women resist the gaze by remaining veiled or relent to the gaze by unveiling themselves. The former correlates with the view that the wearing of the veil is seen as a marker of resistance to Western identity. Indeed, the concept of the visible portrays the veil as a nexus of competing national images and identities. Under this interpretation, the physical appearance of the veiled body seems challenging or intimidating to both Western, non-Muslim viewers and 'Westernised' Muslim viewers. In particular, the presence of veiled Muslim women in public may be perceived as 'threatening', especially to those viewers who are convinced that Muslims are a 'threat' *per se*. Consequently, veiled Muslim women may be 'punished' for their supposedly deviant identity performance by being attacked verbally and physically in the public domain of the street. In the eyes of the attacker,

veiled Muslim women are ‘taught a lesson’ about what happens when they do not conform by removing the veil in public places in the West. As already mentioned, certain European countries have applied restrictive measures and bans on the visibility of the veil in the public sphere; however, for veiled Muslim women who choose to wear it, the visibility of the veil is key to their identification as followers of Islam, particularly in the West.

2.3 Religious observance

Religious piety and observance to the *Quranic* prescriptions is one of the most popular reasons behind the practice of veiling. In light of this, it is important to refer to relevant *Quranic* verses that document the importance of veiling in Islam. There are two types of separation through veiling practices in Islam. The first type of veiling refers to an architectural separation in the *Quran* (33:53), when a curtain was drawn between the Prophet Muhammad, his wives and his companions in order to mark out the public and private domain.

> *When you want to ask something from the wives of the Prophet, ask them from behind the curtain.*

According to this *Quranic* prescription, the practice of veiling allows women to participate in the public sphere of men. In addition to this *Quranic* reference, the second type of veiling pertains to dress and modesty, and similarly has its roots in the *Quran* (24:31):

> *And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers ... their sons ... their brothers ... or their women.*

From this perspective, the wearing of the veil demonstrates participants' conformity and devotion to *Allah*'s commandments, and makes a public statement of religious submission to Islam. Furthermore, the wearing of the veil offers an alternative role model for Muslim girls and women which puts them on a moral high ground in comparison to their non-Muslim peers (Tarlo, 2007). This line of argument emphasises the meaning of the veil as a sign of modesty which demands respect. In this sense, the most prominent justifications for veiling stem from the exegesis prescribed in the following *Quranic* passage (33:59):

> *Oh Prophet, tell your wives and daughters, and believing women, to draw their cloaks around them so that they may be recognised and not harmed.*

As a visible manifestation of being a follower of Islam, the wearing of the veil indicates Muslim identity, protection from sexual harassment and a badge of allegiance of Islam and Muslims. At the same time, these *Quranic* verses could be interpreted in different ways. For example, one might take a strict interpretation of these passages while another might situate these texts in the context of the times of the Prophet Muhammad (Hasan, 2011). As such, veiling is not seen as a *Quranic* obligation for all Muslim women, although it becomes a *Quranic* obligation for some Muslim women in the context of a particular understanding of the purpose of veiling in Islam.

Religious observance is not the only possible purpose of veiling. Even if one accepts the idea of religion as the most plausible motivation for veiling, the gender of the wearer remains an obviously relevant factor to the way in which religion is observed. In this regard, veiling is connected with the macro-social challenges of the present age. For example, some Muslim women – by asserting their interpretation of the 'true' Islam signalled by their decision to wear the veil – demonstrate that Islam accords equal rights to men and women by offering them the choice for autonomous decision-making (Hannan, 2011). This includes the right to wear the veil, the right to choose their own marriage partners, and equally importantly, the right to work, to go to university, and to move freely in the public sphere.

Correspondingly, the adoption of the veil by Muslim girls and women in the UK often constitutes a rejection of Islamic tradition. Werbner (2007) highlights that young British Muslims adopt voluntarily an 'extremist' ideology – veiling for women and beards for men – in order to empower themselves to choose their own marriage partners, sometimes against their parents' opinion. Werbner (2007: 171) states that 'They accuse their parents of being ignorant, locked into false or mistaken parochial 'customs' and 'traditions' of the old country, which, according to the girls, distort 'true' Islam'. Upper middle-class Pakistani parents often refuse marriages for their sons with veiled Muslim girls because they believe that the veil is associated with lower middle-class status (Werbner, 2007). In this context, perceived status and class rather than religious piety and ethnic allegiance are determining factors of a Muslim identity. This observation contradicts the common assumption that for Muslims, religion is the determining factor of identity.

Viewed from this perspective, veiling can be read as a clear indication of a 'new', 'radical' interpretation of Islam by Muslim girls and women who are born and bred, or largely raised, in the UK. Correspondingly, Islamic feminists who argue for gender equality in the name of Islam, are engaged in re-reading Islamic texts in an attempt to distinguish between Islamic principles and patriarchal traditions and practices. Afshar, Aitken and Franks (2005) claim that British Muslim girls and women are more likely to disagree on 'traditional' interpretations of Islam with their parents. In this regard, it is their British education (and the demands it makes of them to have enquiring minds) that allows young British Muslim women to adopt a new and more individualistic interpretation, which results in a new 'British form of Islam'. Under this 'modern' Islamic interpretation, some Muslim parents might find it harder to marry off their veiled daughters in arranged marriages. Relatedly, Werbner (2007: 175) states that 'For Pakistani girls living in encapsulated, highly conservative, immigrant residential areas, veiling is often a small price to pay for freedom of movement'. This discussion shows that for some Muslim women veiling is a statement of independence, which allows for identity negotiation and the legitimatisation of everyday social practices in the public sphere.

Furthermore, the wearing of the veil appears to have specific advantages according to veiled Muslim women who choose to wear it. Research highlights the sense of belonging to the *ummah* (the global Muslim community) that veiled Muslim women feel despite living in a non-Muslim country. Read and Bartkowski (2000) examined how a sample of Muslim women living in Austin, Texas negotiated their gender identity in light of ongoing public debates about the propriety of wearing the *hijab* in the West. The study revealed the significance of Muslim women's friendship networks in relation to the *hijab*, which were particularly useful because they lived in a non-Muslim country. Tarlo (2007) focused on the significance of the *hijab* as a visible indicator of 'difference' in multicultural London. Participants in this study stated that through their *hijabs*, they could greet complete strangers when they travelled abroad, marking their collective recognition of belonging to the *ummah*, whilst simultaneously contributing towards the creation of such a community in the process.[6]

Zebiri (2008), whose study focused on white British converts, found that the perceived benefits and advantages of wearing the *hijab* in the West included a sense of belonging to the *ummah*, freedom of movement and better marriage prospects. Participants in this study reported that the wearing of the *hijab* strengthened their Muslim identity and increased their sense of self-confidence (Zebiri, 2008). With respect to the latter argument, participants reported a rise in self-esteem in relation to the issue of female sexuality, feeling that their *hijab* was a statement against consumerism and the objectification of women's bodies in the West. Hasan (2011) notes that adultery, pornography, provocative fashions and the increasing sexualisation of young girls in Western society are just a few examples of deteriorating standards of public decency in the West. As a means of public modesty, the veil protects Muslim women from such harms and functions as a visible rejection of the sexual promiscuity of the West.

[6] Read and Bartkowski (2000) argue that veiling practices encourage feelings of sympathy, trust and shared community with women of different religions as well. According to this line of argument, there may be existing parallels between the gendered experiences of veiled Muslim women and their conservative Protestant, Orthodox Jewish and Orthodox Christian counterparts.

2.4 Multiple identities

Veiled Muslim women are stereotypically seen as a composition of discrete identity elements such as gender and religion, which points to a one-dimensional, cumulative model of identity (Vakulenko, 2007). However, the inseparability of the individual identity from cultural and socio-political factors is crucial to understanding the heterogeneity in Islam. According to this line of argument, the meanings behind the veil are simultaneously overlapping and multidimensional on the basis that they are rooted in both individual and collective realities. At the same time, identities are part of a process of change and continuity rather than a static attribute. This means that different aspects of identity may be mobilised accordingly in different situations. Indeed, the wider Muslim community is hardly homogenous in relation to the wearing of the veil. For example, only a minority of Muslim women follow the practice of veiling in the UK and elsewhere in the West.

Human identities are pluralist, fluid, multifaceted and multidimensional. Bauman (2000) notes that the nature, formation, maintenance and multiplicity of self-identity are tasks under continual construction. At the same time, identity negotiation is a process and everyday practice that is often fraught with ambiguity, contradiction and struggle (Read and Bartkowski, 2000). Taking a similar position, Castells (2004) argues that human identities are continually constructed while being influenced by micro and macro factors in relation to biological, cultural, historical, geographical, institutional and psychological processes. From this perspective, continuity is sustained by shared memories, stories and cultural practices whilst change is both a reaction to circumstances and a process of negotiations that result in a multiplicity of identities that 'may or may not contradict each other' (Ghorashi, 2003: 29). This line of argument points to the interaction amongst different identity characteristics such as gender, age, sexuality, race, ethnicity, education, to name but some. This observation is crucial to understanding the specificities of the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women and their decision to wear the veil.

In light of this, it is important to recognise heterogeneity in Islam in relation to its diversity on the basis of dress. As Lewis (2007) observes, garments or combinations of garments change over time quite often within

the lifespan of a single woman. From this perspective, attempts to define which type of body covering is exclusively Islamic can only be seen as partial. Moors and Tarlo (2007) note that in Mali, Indonesia and India, there are regionally specific forms of Muslim dress that have little in common with each other. Mohanty (1991) observes that while there may be a physical similarity in the veils worn by Muslim women in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, the specific meaning attached to this practice varies according to the cultural and ideological context.

Interestingly, the issue of religious modesty is not restricted to followers of Islam. In Christianity, Saint Paul instructed women to cover their heads in the presence of God (1 Corinthians 11), and veiling in church has been a longstanding practice in Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism. In essence, the covering of the hair transcends religion and culture. Medieval European women, Catholic women and nuns until 1960s as well as contemporary Jewish and Christian groups (such as the Amish), have considered the covering of women's hair as a religious obligation. In light of this, pro-veiling Islamic feminists are keen to promote the practice of veiling through their comparison of the ideal veiled Muslim woman with the Christian ideal of the Virgin Mary and nuns (Tarlo, 2007).

Evidence suggests that the veil neither originated in, nor is unique to, Islam. Shirazi (2001) notes that the wearing of the veil is a tradition passed down to Islam from the Assyrian and Byzantine culture. In Assyrian, Greco-Roman, and Byzantine empires, veiling and seclusion were symbols of status.[7] In the first century after Islam was established, veiling practices were not common and it was in the second Islamic century that the wearing of the veil became popular, mainly amongst the upper class as a symbol of status and class hierarchy. El Guindi (1999) points out that in Assyria (modern Iraq), slave women were prohibited from wearing the veil whilst women of 'noble birth' (that is, women who were born into upper-class families) were obliged to be veiled. This discussion indicates that veiling was a status symbol – a

[7] For example, an Assyrian legal text dating back to the 13th century B.C. stated that prostitutes should not wear the veil, restricting its use to 'respectable' women (Shirazi, 2001). The practice of veiling one's face appeared in classical Greece, the Byzantine Christian world, Persia, and India. In ancient Greek society, free women were secluded to the extent that they would not be seen by men who were not close relatives.

‘visible’ indicator of socio-economic status – for ancient and medieval women from whom Muslim women are alleged to have adopted the practice of wearing the veil.

2.5 Veiling and fashion

Contemporary veiling exists within fashion’s perimeters whilst there is a growing body of consumer goods, from Islamic chocolate to wallpaper and Barbie doll lookalikes, through which new normative models of an ideal Islamic lifestyle are promoted (Tarlo, 2007). Similarly to other female garments, the veil can be produced in different styles and with differing ornamental designs to enhance its attractiveness. Far from being a monolithic religious piece of cloth, the veil points to a multiplicity of female sexuality for its wearers. For example, the loose dress of the veil once taken off reveals underneath fashionable clothing, thereby ‘making a more individual and personal statement than the collective public one of the veil’ (Abu Odeh, 1993: 34). Some Muslim girls and women have become more fashion conscious in the public sphere by wearing make-up and fashion accessories with the veil. They have also become more creative as the loose dress of the veil becomes slightly tighter, more colourful and more daring in emulating Western fashions, even if it does not explicitly reveal parts of the female body.

With this variety in veiling comes the critical gaze of some pious Muslims who claim that Muslim girls and women who wear the veil as a fashion accessory have lost its ‘true’ meaning as a form of public modesty and chastity. Tarlo (2007) reveals that veiled Muslim women often ‘police’ each other’s veils in terms of exploring the boundaries of what is and what is not acceptable. For example, exposing the neck or living hair visible for those wearing the *hijab*, and wearing make-up for those wearing the *niqab* is often criticised. Some members of the British branch of the Islamic political party *Hizb ut-Tahrir* do not approve of the clothes worn by the new generation of *hijab* wearers such as the combination of jeans with the *hijab* (Afshar *et al*., 2005). At the same time, a number of styles worn by Muslim women in different parts of the world – for instance the *sari* and *shalwar kamiz*, which are both popular in South Asia – are viewed as ‘un-Islamic’ in certain pious

Muslim circles. Werbner (2007) observes that Pakistani Muslim women tend to wear a light chiffon scarf called *dupatta*, which is loosely draped around their necks; alternatively, they wear a *chador*, a very large shawl which is draped around the head and upper part of the body. Both types of head covering are 'ethnic' and reveal the ethnic identity of its wearers.

However, according to strict interpretations of the *Quran*, the veil should cover a woman's whole body (including the palms of her hands), it should be monotone in colour (preferably black so as not to draw attention), and it should be opaque and loose so as not to reveal the woman's shape or what she is wearing underneath (Read and Bartkowski, 2000). Similarly, there are *Quranic* injunctions about the dress of men in Islam. Muslim men must wear *shalwar kameez* (long tunic and pants), maintain beards and also avoid styling their hair (Gabriel, 2011). This discussion shows that, according to the *Quran*, the dress of both Muslim women and men should be modest and distinctive from the dress of non-Muslims and as a result, representative of the Islamic faith and culture.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the meanings of the veil are more complicated than making a permanent and unchanging statement about the relative oppression or liberation of its wearers. Rather, veiling practices may be experienced as liberating or oppressive by different women in the same society depending on variables such as religious commitment, socio-economic class, age, race, ethnicity, personal biographic experience and the particularities of living in a multicultural city. This is demonstrated within the British context amongst Muslim girls and women who veil for a multiplicity of different reasons. However, in the eyes of the 'ideal' spectator, veiling practices are reduced to a threatening set of symbols of 'difference' and Muslim 'otherness'. As a result, Muslim women find themselves at the centre of contestations about their identities, their 'loyalty' to Western/British values, and their commitment to faith, or lack of it. As Chapter One has shown, the veil is perceived as a symbol of gender oppression and Islamist terrorism as well as a 'threat' to national cohesion. As such, the veil must be removed either by the State or individuals. Ultimately, both historical and contemporary

stereotypical Islamophobic understandings of the veil ignore the specificities of veiled Muslim women's lived experiences and instead, justify and legitimise manifestations of Islamophobia towards veiled Muslim women on the streets of Britain as the next chapter reveals.

Chapter Three
The Significance of Islamophobic Victimisation

3.1 Introduction

The chapter examines the nature and impact of Islamophobic victimisation upon veiled Muslim women, their families and wider Muslim communities. It also explores explanations behind this type of victimisation through the lens of gender. Evidence suggests that veiled Muslim women are at heightened risk of Islamophobic victimisation by virtue of their visible 'Muslimness'. Popular perceptions that veiled Muslim women are passive, oppressed and powerless increase their chance of assault, thereby marking them as 'easy' targets to attack. Furthermore, attacks towards veiled Muslim women are justified because of the conflation of Islam with terrorism. Taken together, these arguments highlight the gendered dimensions of Islamophobic victimisation. The chapter also considers the problem of non-reporting of Islamophobic attacks. It argues that, in line with other forms of targeted violence, victims of Islamophobia are less likely to report this victimisation to the police. It will be concluded that there is no single monolithic Muslim experience of Islamophobia. Recognising the interplay of different aspects of victims' identities with other personal, social and situational factors is relevant to understanding the nature and impact of Islamophobic victimisation upon victims, both individually and collectively.

3.2 Conceptualising Islamophobia

As discussed in Chapter One, the Orientalist roots of the process of 'Othering' of Islam and Muslims paved the way for the current climate of Islamophobia; however, the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks played a major role in heightening Islamophobic perceptions of Muslims in the West. These attacks and subsequent media portrayals of the events facilitated a deeper resentment and fear of Islam and Muslims than existed before. This infers that contemporary Islamophobia is a reflection of a historical anti-Muslim, anti-Islamic phenomenon which was constructed in colonial times but has increased significantly after the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks. The political

and media furore in the aftermath of these events illustrates the ways in which Muslim identities can be transformed across time and space. The effect of these transformations has been the construction of hate and fear, resulting in the rise in the level of Islamophobia through the construction of the Muslim as 'Other', and the demonisation of Muslims and their associated bodily marking and dress.

The popular press has had a massive impact in terms of determining notions of the 'threat' of Islam. At the same time, counter-terrorism measures have contributed to the demonisation of Muslims in political, media and public discourses, portraying Islam and Muslims as a security 'threat'. Spalek and Lambert (2008) point out that since 9/11 and 7/7, terrorism has been the subject of intense media interest, political discourse and public scrutiny in the British context, whilst a major concern has been that the 7/7 terrorists were British-born. The terminology of the 'new terrorism' has helped to justify a re-configuration of security systems, legislation, and police powers.[8] The notion of 'new terrorism' is based on the construction of Muslim minorities as 'suspect communities' who should be monitored by state agencies, casting new questions about national identity, security and loyalty (Spalek and Lambert, 2008). Clearly, this approach has created a climate of fear and suspicion towards 'visible' Muslims.[9] As a result, British Muslims have reported feeling increasingly alienated and isolated (Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011).

Seen through the prism of security risk, incompatible 'difference' and self-segregation, Muslims in the West have emerged as the new 'folk devils' (Cohen, 1972) of popular and media imagination. Within this paradigm, Islam is understood as a violent political ideology, religion and culture, Muslim men

[8] Post the 9/11 attacks, the number of Asian people stopped and searched under anti-terrorism laws in the UK quadrupled in a single year, from 744 in 2001-2002 to 2,989 in 2002-2003 (Morris, 2004). Following the 2005 bombing of London's transport infrastructure, there was a seven-fold increase in the number of people of Asian appearance stopped and searched by British Transport Police under the use of counter-terrorism police powers (Dodd, 2005).

[9] Following the 7/7 bombings, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair stated: 'Let no one be in doubt. The rules of the game have changed' echoing Bush's false dilemma in 2001 ''You're either with us, or against us''. Afshar (2008) states that immediately after 7/7 there was a 'shoot to kill' policy that could threaten anyone assumed to have been 'a Muslim terrorist'. One man, Jean Charles de Menezes, was mistakenly shot dead by the Metropolitan Police who followed him on to a tube train at Stockwell station in London the day after the failed attacks of 21 July 2005 as he was misidentified as one of the suspects (Cobain, 2010).

are perceived as the embodiment of terrorism, fundamentalism and extremism, and Muslim women are viewed as the personification of gender oppression in Islam, especially if they are veiled. Ultimately, such stereotypes provide fertile ground for public expressions of Islamophobia. Manifestations of Islamophobia include verbal abuse, threats and intimidation, harassment, physical assault and violence, property damage, hate mail and literature, as well as offensive online and internet abuse.[10]

For the purposes of this discussion, it is important to differentiate between the terms 'Islamophobia' and 'Islamophobic victimisation'. According to Mythen, Walklate and Khan (2009), the concept of 'victimisation' is understood as the act by which someone is rendered a victim, the experience of being a victim in parallel with the socio-cultural process by which this occurs. This conceptual framework indicates that victimisation can be 'ideological' (for example pertaining to ideas and concepts that victimise individuals or groups) or it can have material consequences for those who are victimised (for example through verbal and physical abuse). From this perspective, it could be argued that the concept of Islamophobia is 'ideological' as it refers to an abstract notion of antipathy to Islam whilst the notion of Islamophobic victimisation refers to the material dimensions of anti-Islamic, anti-Muslim hostility.[11] Under this interpretation, Islamophobic victimisation refers to manifestations of Islamophobia on the basis that it is the acting out of that antipathy.

In 1997, the publication of the Runnymede Trust report entitled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* was the first report to raise awareness about the problem of Islamophobia in the UK. It defined Islamophobia as 'the

[10] Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) note that Muslims in London face a threat of violence and intimidation from three arenas. First, from a relatively small violent extremist nationalist milieu that shares the same ideology as the British National Party (BNP), the English Defence League (EDL), the National Front (NF) and Combat 18. Secondly, from London gangs who have no allegiance with, or affinity to, the BNP or the violent extremist nationalist milieu that surrounds that party. Thirdly, from 'ordinary' Londoners and visitors to London who have become convinced and angry by negative portrayals of Muslims as security threats.

[11] Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) differentiate between anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic hostility. They argue that the concept of anti-Muslim hostility refers to hostility directed toward Muslims while anti-Islamic hostility refers to hostility which is directed toward the faith of Islam. As shown by this tenuous distinction between hostility directed toward people and hostility directed toward faith, the grounds for determining whether incidents should be understood as anti-Muslim or anti-Islamic are not clearly distinguishable.

shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims' (Runnymede Trust, 1997: 1). Building upon this definition, Chakraborti and Zempi (2012: 271) described Islamophobia as 'a fear or hatred of Islam that translates into ideological and material forms of cultural racism against obvious markers of 'Muslimness'. This framework emphasises 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 also interprets Islamophobia as a 'new' form of racism, whereby Islamic religion, tradition and culture are seen as a 'threat' to the British/Western values.

It is important to recognise that racism can occur in situations where neither the reality nor concept of race actually exists (Allen, 2010a). As Meer *et al.* (2010) point out, understandings of racism should not focus exclusively on race and thus overlooking religion and culture. According to this line of argument, conceptualising racism exclusively as a form of 'biological determinism' ignores the ways in which cultural racism draws upon other markers of 'difference' to identify minority groups and individuals that do not conform with 'mainstream' society. Modood (1997: 165) states that:

> *Cultural racism is likely to be particularly aggressive against those minority communities that want to maintain – and not just defensively – some of the basic elements of their culture or religion; if, far from denying their difference (beyond the colour of their skin), they want to assert this difference in public, and demand that they be respected just as they are.*

Taking a similar position, Law (2010) highlights the complex chameleon-like character of racism, which changes in terms of form and content across different times and contexts. Law (2010) observes that racism takes many forms and links this reality to contemporary perceptions of Western superiority and to this end, legitimised violence towards Muslims. This new form of racism can be interpreted as racism of 'reaction', based on the perceived 'threat' to traditional social and cultural identities. It can also be understood as racism of 'surveillance' premised on the notion that cultural

difference slides into the demonisation and stigmatisation of ‘Other’ cultures in the interests of ‘protecting’ the European people, which is a different entity to the European population as a whole (Law, 2010). This line of argument suggests that the key element of contemporary racism is the attribution of negative cultural characteristics to ‘Other’ minority groups.

In light of popular debates about national identity, immigration and community cohesion, colour racism has ceased to be acceptable; nevertheless, a cultural racism which emphasises the ‘Other’, alien values of Muslims has increased (Zebiri, 2008). In this context, cultural difference is understood as ‘cultural deviance’ and equated with the notion of cultural threat. Parekh (2000: 60) observes that contemporary anti-Muslim racism is ‘one of the most serious forms of cultural hostility in modern Europe’. Similarly, Modood (1997) identifies that Islamophobia is at the heart of contemporary British and European cultural racism. In this context, Islam is routinely portrayed as an external ‘threat’ to distinctly European norms and values.

For advocates of the ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis, there is a cultural war between Islam and the West. In the British context, Islam and Muslims have increasingly been seen to be ‘culturally dangerous’ and threatening the ‘British way of life’. Whilst recognising that Muslim minorities differ in the context of European countries – predominantly Algerian in France, Turkish in Germany and Austria, Pakistani in the UK – it is increasingly Islamic religion, tradition and culture that have been seen as a ‘threat’ to the Western ideals of democracy, freedom of speech and gender equality. At the same time though, it is often argued that Islamophobia ‘does not exist’. For example, atheist Richard Dawkins has stated that racism against a religion cannot exist on the basis that ‘It is not a race … Islam is a religion’, whilst British journalist Andrew Gilligan has stated that anti-Muslim hate crime has been exaggerated by ‘the Islamophobia industry’ (Shackle, 2013: n.p.). As Chakraborti and Zempi (2012) note, the prevalence of Islamophobic victimisation is difficult to measure, as it is both an under-researched topic and under-reported phenomenon. Nevertheless, existing evidence lends weight to the view that Islamophobia does exist, as can be seen in the following analysis of the existing literature.

3.3 Nature of Islamophobic victimisation

In their ground-breaking report, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, the Runnymede Trust (1997) examined the nature and extent of anti-Muslim hostility and prejudice in Britain. It was established that Islamophobic attitudes had become 'more explicit, more extreme and more dangerous … prevalent in all sections of society' (Runnymede Trust, 1997: 1). The report also noted how Islamophobia was becoming a 'fact of life' for many British Muslim women. Focusing on Islamophobia in the European Union (EU) following 9/11, Allen and Nielsen (2002) found that typical manifestations of Islamophobia included incidents of verbal and physical abuse targeted towards Muslim women. In particular, Muslim women who wore the *hijab* were the most likely targets for verbal abuse, being spat at, having their headscarves torn from them and being physically assaulted. Mosques were also attacked, ranging from minor vandalism to arson and firebombs.

Moreover, the Home Office (2001) report *Religious Discrimination in England and Wales* noted that for the majority of Muslim respondents verbal abuse and hostility had become commonplace, especially post-9/11. Spalek's (2002) study about British Muslim women's fear of crime found that all of her research participants had felt more vulnerable to intimidation and harassment as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. McGhee (2005) observed that there was a four-fold increase in the number of racist attacks reported by British Muslims and other Asian, ostensibly 'Muslim-looking', groups in the UK during the months immediately after 9/11. This heightened sense of vulnerability since 9/11 has also been reported in Garland and Chakraborti's (2004) studies of racism in rural England. In the three weeks following the 7/7 bombings, police figures showed a six-fold increase in the number of religiously motivated offences reported in London, the vast majority of which were directed against Muslim households and places of worship, whilst in the same three-week period over 1,200 suspected Islamophobic incidents were recorded by police forces across the UK (BBC News, 2005).

Similar findings were evident in the report *Islamophobia: Issues, Challenges and Action* published by the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (2004). The Commission emphasised the high levels of Islamophobia targeted towards 'visible' Muslims. It also highlighted the

vulnerability of Muslim women wearing *hijabs* as victims of Islamophobia. The report provided examples of Muslim women who had their *hijabs* forcibly pulled from their heads, whilst others had alcohol thrown at them. More serious examples included Muslim women who had been hit with baseball bats, an attack on a Muslim child with pepper spray whilst in one case a Muslim woman was deliberately run over by a car. In a similar vein, the report *Muslims in the UK: Policies for Engaged Citizens* highlighted that post-9/11 Muslim women had suffered high levels of discrimination (Open Society Institute, 2005). In particular, 'practising' young Muslim women were likely to face discrimination because of their affiliation to Islam. In this regard, religion rather than race or ethnicity was recognised as being a more important marker upon which discrimination was based, echoing Allen and Nielsen's (2002) finding that individuals were being increasingly targeted on the visibility of their Muslim identity.

Further evidence of the prominence of Muslim women as targets of Islamophobic discrimination was published in the report *Data in Focus: Muslims* by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2009). The report found that approximately 26 per cent of Muslim women across a number of different European countries had experienced discrimination in the preceding year. Weller (2011), who examined religious discrimination in Britain since 2000, found that Muslims experience religious discrimination with a frequency and seriousness that is proportionately greater than that experienced by those of other religions.

Evidently, research suggests that 'visible' Muslims in general and veiled Muslim women in particular emerge as 'ideal' targets for those who wish to attack a symbol of Islam. In this regard, the visibility of their 'Muslimness' is key to rendering them 'ideal' victims for Islamophobic attacks in public. In a report published by the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), Allen and Nielsen (2002: 35) found that the stimulant behind the vast majority of Islamophobic incidents was the fact that victims were identified as Muslims by 'visual identifiers', namely something that could be recognisably associated with Islam:

> *It seems that behind the vast majority of attacks and infringements upon specific communities and individuals was the fact that they were identified as Muslims, whether they in fact were or not, by something that could be recognisably associated with Islam; this we call visual identifiers. Whilst these were not necessarily in themselves the reason for any attacks, it would seem that they were the single most predominant factor in determining who or what became the victim of retaliation.*

Within this paradigm, the visual identifiers of Islam are the tools for identification upon which Islamophobia can be expressed. This approach demonstrates why certain individuals and groups are more likely to become targets for hostility than others. As Allen (2010b) points out, when the visual identifiers of Islam hold such primacy in determining who or what become the targets for violence, it is veiled Muslim women in particular – possibly the most visually identifiable religious adherents in the West – who become the primary *foci* for retaliation. This ties in with the suggestions of Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) who documented the heightened sense of vulnerability of Muslim women who wore *hijab* or *niqab* in public places in London.

Certainly, another focus for manifestations of Islamophobia has been mosques. As Allen and Nielsen (2002: 37) point out, mosques have become a 'very easy and readily identifiable target' due to their visible nature. However, from a comparative perspective, it is likely that the wearing of the veil constitutes Muslim women *the* most highly visible target of Islamophobia. In the words of Allen and Nielsen (2002: 38), 'the most violent, dangerous and prolific forms of Islamophobic hatred were directed at real people rather than the religious buildings and material constructs of Islam'. As with the veil for Muslim women, the beard – particularly reinforced by images of the Taliban and Osama bin Laden – is a visual identifier that can be attributed to Muslim men. Yet as a visual identifier of Islam, the beard is rarely associated with attacks against Muslims.[12] Allen and Nielsen (2002) argue that although

[12] In Zebiri's (2008) study of white converts to Islam, male participants reported far fewer problems than female participants premised on the notion that their religious identity was less 'visible'. It also emerged that the male participants were less likely to be verbally abused

the beard is a common visual identifier of Muslim men, many of those that participated in acts of violence towards Muslims, acted against visual identifiers that were essentially media-derived from the post-9/11 period, namely the Muslim veil as a sign of gender oppression, Islamist terrorism and a lack of integration. This observation signals the consequential impact on public opinion that media representations can hold. It also offers fresh insights into the targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women.

As of 2014 official figures and academic research indicate that anti-Muslim hate crimes are currently at record levels compared to the beginning of the decade. From the period between September 2001 and 2010 successive Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) racist incident monitoring reports highlight that Muslims accounted for more than half of all incidents of religiously aggravated offences at 54 per cent, whilst up to 60 per cent of mosques, Islamic centres and Muslim organisations suffered at least one attack (Ahmed, 2012). In 2011 over half of British Muslims reported having experienced at least one incident of Islamophobic abuse, harassment or intimidation in public (Ahmed, 2012). From April 2012 to April 2013, the Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks project (MAMA, 2013) found that 58 per cent of all reported incidents were against Muslim women, whilst 80 per cent of the Muslim women targeted were visually identifiable as being Muslim because of their dress.

Following the murder of British army soldier Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich, London by two Islamist extremists in May 2013, there was a clear spike in attacks on Muslims. For example, more than 140 Islamophobic incidents were reported to the Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks project in the 48 hours following the Woolwich murder (Independent, 2013). The preceding discussion not only supports the very real existence of Islamophobia but also highlights the targeted victimisation of ‘visible’ Muslims and particularly of veiled Muslim women. However, even when its existence is acknowledged, Islamophobic victimisation is frequently discussed in gender-neutral ways.

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than the female participants due to the latter being perceived as a ‘soft’ target (Zebiri, 2008). The types of experiences of Islamophobia reported by male participants in this study were mostly in relation to getting job interviews and jobs (on condition that they used their Muslim names) and being promoted at work (Zebiri, 2008).

3.4 The gendered dimensions of Islamophobic victimisation

Despite the link between the visibility of Islam and incidents of Islamophobic victimisation in public, the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women remains a largely ignored phenomenon. In light of this, it is important to recognise that issues around the 'Muslim veil' are intersectional: the term suggests that the garment in question is religious in nature but it is also gender-specific, as only Muslim women (and not Muslim men) adopt the practice of wearing it. Nevertheless, the intersection of gender and religion in relation to the 'Muslim veil' has not been adequately considered or analysed. As Vakulenko (2007) observes, there is a noticeable tendency to overlook or underestimate the connection between gender and Islamophobic victimisation. Recognition and analysis of the key role of the Muslim veil in relation to public manifestations of Islamophobia is essential in order to understand the nature of this victimisation.

At a general level, social constructions of gender are central to the imagination and reproduction of national identities whilst, at a more fundamental level, women may be seen as biological reproducers of members of ethnic groups and, by extension, as reproducers of boundaries of national collectivities (Meer *et al*., 2010). By this line of thinking, 'women may become the signifiers of national differences in the construction, reproduction and transformation of national categories' (Meer *et al*., 2010: 85). Although men are more likely to monopolise the nation's political and military representation, it is women who come to 'embody' the nation as such (Lutz, Pheonix and Yuval-Davis, 1995). From this perspective, women are seen as vehicles for transmitting national and cultural values. Ultimately, the veil emerges as the typifying content of Islam on the basis that the practice of veiling makes the abstract and universal concept of Islam more concrete. Reflections such as these may help to explain why the image of the veiled Muslim woman has become such a visual representative of Islam.

It is evident that the veil is *the* most visible symbol of Islam in the West. By virtue of the fact that it draws together various anti-Muslim themes, the veil serves as a focal point for antipathy towards Islam and Muslims. In particular, the 'gendered' dimensions of Islamophobic victimisation are premised on five different, yet interrelated, arguments. First, gender

precipitates anti-Muslim hostility on the basis that the wearing of the veil marks Muslim women as particularly vulnerable to Islamophobic victimisation in public. In this regard, stereotypes about Muslim women's passivity (particularly if wearing the veil) render them 'ideal subjects' against whom to enact Islamophobic attacks. As already discussed in Chapter One, the wearing of the veil is routinely seen as an oppressive and subordinating practice which is not 'welcome' in the West. Based on the Western perspective, veiled Muslim women are routinely perceived as submissive, passive and with very little power over their lives. Thus, popular perceptions that veiled Muslim women are deemed 'passive' increase their chance of assault, thereby marking them as an 'easy' target to attack.

Secondly, despite the actual or perceived degree of agency of the veil wearing woman, the visibility of the veil in the West provokes public manifestations of Islamophobia by virtue of its symbolism as a sign of self-segregation, either imposed or chosen. Although freedom of choice and individual agency are amongst the most cherished values in contemporary Western societies, the woman who freely chooses to veil often provokes public hostility. According to Goffman (1963), individuals whose stigma is 'visible' experience more hostility than individuals with 'concealable' stigmas. Given that the majority of Muslim women do not wear the veil, those Muslim women who do wear it are likely to be perceived as having a 'controllable' stigma for actively choosing to wear it (Ghumman and Ryan, 2013). In other words, when Muslim women choose to wear the veil, they are seen as purposefully isolating themselves and rejecting Western values. Based on Goffman's (1963) approach, individuals who have such 'controllable' stigmas are more likely to be subjected to stigmatisation based on the premise that they are perceived as being 'responsible' for their own condition. As such, veiled Muslim women are likely to experience Islamophobic victimisation not only because of the visibility of the veil but also because of its perceived controllability.

Thirdly, the 'refusal' of veiled Muslim women to conform to the expectation of being 'the object of the gaze' constitutes a disruption of power relations in the public sphere. It was contended in Chapter Two that the visibility of the veil confounds public norms, partly because of the veil's

message of sexual unavailability. This symbolism brings the veiled Muslim woman very visibly into the public sphere where she simply cannot walk by unnoticed. In this context, the veil symbolises the sexual 'non-availability' of Muslim women. As a result, men (and women) may find it difficult to forgive those who 'disrupt' the 'pattern of the masculine gaze' (Franks, 2000). Ultimately, veiled Muslim women may be attacked for failing to conform to men's expectations of how women should dress and behave.

Fourthly, the image of the veiled Muslim woman represents 'Islam', the religion of the perpetrators of the terror attacks of 9/11 and 7/7. In this sense, veiled Muslim women are seen as responsible for the actions of the terrorists. As such, attacks towards veiled Muslim women are justified because of the conflation of Islam with terrorism. Moreover, veiled Muslim women might be seen as 'terrorist' bodies on the basis that their face is covered and to this end, the veil could be used as a camouflage for a terrorist. This link legitimises Islamophobic attacks toward veiled Muslim women when they are seen in public. From this perspective, the veil is completely separated from the individual wearing it; rather, it is seen as part of an Islamist agenda that aims to impose Sharia law in the West. The effect is to construct and maintain the particular identity and meaning ascribed to veiled Muslim bodies, thereby contributing to a hostile environment towards women whose Muslim identity is visible through the process of veiling in a non-Muslim country. Allied with the repetitive effects of erroneously linking Islam to Islamist terrorism, this rhetoric provides the justification for the targeted victimisation of women whose 'Muslimness' is visible in public.

Finally, veiled Muslim women may be targeted because they are seen as more visually 'threatening' than Muslim men as it is more difficult for their Muslim identity to be mistaken, denied, or concealed. A key theme emerging from the existing research literature is that veiled Muslim women are more vulnerable to Islamophobic attacks in public because they are easily identifiable as Muslims. Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) found that men and women experience Islamophobia in different ways and this was linked to the greater visibility of veiled Muslim women.[13] Afshar *et al.* (2005: 262) state that veiled

[13] This is a qualitative study of Muslim women's experiences of studying in Higher Education Institutions across the UK.

Muslim women ‘are publicly branding themselves as Muslims at a time when such a label carries the potential fear of making them vulnerable to open hostility’. In the eyes of the perpetrators, the image of the veiled Muslim woman evokes mixed emotions of fear and hostility. As such, the wearing of the veil is read in a uniform, linear manner as a practice which is adopted by the Muslim ‘Other’. In this light, the image of the veiled Muslim body challenges or ‘threatens’ hegemonic socio-cultural norms. From this perspective, the veil is seen as a cultural threat to ‘our’ way of life. It is in such a context that Islamophobic victimisation emerges as a means of responding to this ‘threat’.

Collectively, these observations demonstrate that the Muslim veil has simultaneously become a ‘visual identifier’ of Islam and an embodiment of what is in itself stereotypically Islamophobic: namely, the veil as a symbol of Muslim ‘otherness’. As such, for girls and women who adhere to Islamic dress codes that visibly mark them as Muslims, public expressions of Islamophobia are particularly salient. Against the backdrop of the ‘War on Terror’ and the popular perceptions of gender oppression in Islam, the visibility of the veil in the West renders veiled Muslim women the ‘ideal’ target against whom to enact Islamophobic attacks. In other words, the veil marks Muslim women more readily visible as ‘soft’, ‘easy’ and ‘convenient’ targets to attack.

In this light, the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women *vis-à-vis* Islamophobia is premised on their perceived subordination and passivity, dangerousness and self-segregation, coupled with the visibility of their Muslim identity. This line of argument can help us to recognise that Islamophobia, implicit as it is in contemporary media, political and public discourses, offers ‘us’ (the ‘ideal’ spectators) a vehicle with which we are expected to envisage the Muslim ‘Other’. In this context, manifestations of Islamophobia against ‘Other’ Muslim women are accepted, even expected. That said, it should be acknowledged that not every veiled Muslim woman will be a victim of Islamophobia. This observation is echoed by Mythen (2007: 466) who states:

> *Being, or becoming a victim is not a neat or absolute journey. Acquiring the status of victim involves being party to a range of interactions and processes, including identification, labelling and recognition.*

Essentially, becoming a victim is a social process which requires a cognitive decision by the person(s) against whom it is directed to view themselves as victims, as part of their strategy for coping with it (Green, 2007). However, not everyone who has been victimised will necessarily regard themselves as a victim. The research literature demonstrates that some recipients of abuse and harassment do not appreciate being referred to as 'victims' (see, for example, Bowling and Phillips, 2002). Moreover, some people may not recognise that they have been victimised. For example, Islamophobic victimisation may form such an intrinsic part of their everyday experience that the individuals or groups against whom it is directed consider it to be 'normal' and as a result, may not appreciate that they have been victimised (Allen, Isakjee and Young, 2013). At the same time, the term 'victim' is not always an appropriate one to use when referring to the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women, not least because it tends to perpetuate an imagery of inevitability about the process of 'Othering' and passivity on the part of the recipient. However, in the context of the present discussion, the term has been used deliberately to give emphasis to the 'invisibility' of Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia, thereby raising awareness about the vulnerability of women who look 'different' and overtly 'Muslim' in the current climate of Islamophobia.

3.5 Islamophobic victimisation and its impact on victims

Similar to other forms of targeted victimisation, the impact of Islamophobic victimisation is felt at a variety of levels: by the direct victim, the wider community to which the victim belongs and society as a whole (Iganski, 2001). As such, the following discussion operates on two broad levels, the individual and the collective. Generally speaking, crime can incur a number of different 'costs' following a victimisation experience that involve emotional, psychological, physical and financial liabilities. However, victims who have

been targeted on the basis of their perceived 'Otherness' are likely to experience a host of negative emotions that are qualitatively distinct from those experienced following victimisation that is not motivated by hate or fear towards the 'Other' (Craig-Henderson and Sloan, 2003). The significance of Islamophobic victimisation is premised on the fact that verbal and physical attacks upon veiled Muslim women 'hurt' more than ordinary crimes as they are seen as an attack upon the victims' core identity. Manifestations of Islamophobia – in line with forms of targeted victimisation – can have psychological and emotional effects including depression, anxiety, fear and anger, all of which can adversely affect the victim's quality of life.

The wider hate crime literature demonstrates a 'unique' impact associated with targeted victimisation. Ehrlich (1992) and Garofalo (1997) compared the victimisation experiences of hate-crime victims to victims of non-hate motivated offences. They found that victims of hate crimes generally suffered more traumatic effects such as anger, fear and vulnerability following victimisation than did victims of other crimes. This ties in with the suggestions of Herek, Gillis, Cogan and Glunt (1997) who examined victims' experiences in cases of homophobic hate crime in the US. They found that in some cases hate-crime victims needed as many as five years to overcome the effects of their victimisation, and this time period was more than twice that necessary for victims of non-hate crimes to overcome their victimisation experience (Herek *et al*., 1997). In a subsequent larger study of US-based homophobic hate crime, Herek, Cogan and Gillis (2002) found that even 'minor' expressions of hostility towards members of minority groups can be traumatic, given that minority groups are aware of the extreme violence that has been perpetrated on other members of their group.

As further evidence of the debilitating effects of targeted victimisation, McDevitt, Balboni, Garcia and Gu (2001) surveyed a sample of victims of hate and non-hate motivated aggravated assaults in Boston. Similarly with previous studies, McDevitt *et al*. (2001) found significant differences between hate and non-hate victims with respect to their psychological reactions. They argued that hate crime victims were more likely to lose their jobs, suffer health problems, experience post-incident traumatic stress, and have greater difficulty in overcoming the incident. Research conducted by

Paterson, Kielinger and Fletcher (2008) investigated women's experience of intimidation and violence perpetrated through bigotry on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender bias in London. They found that the majority of victims felt more fearful, depressed and isolated, whilst a small proportion felt suicidal as a result of this victimisation. According to the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (2007), victims reported feeling 'worn down' by daily experiences of racism. Clearly, this reality undermines the quality of life of both individuals and communities affected. Given these empirical findings, it is reasonable to suggest that the psychological and emotional consequences of hate motivated victimisation are more severe if compared to the effects of non-hate motivated victimisation.

A key feature of targeted victimisation is that single incidents tend to be part of a long-term pattern of victimisation, a recurring and, in some cases, constant feature of one's everyday life. This suggests that Islamophobia – similar to hate and racist crimes – is not a static problem, but instead should be seen as a dynamic social process involving context, structure and agency (Chakraborti, 2010; Bowling, 1999; Kelly, 1987). For Rowe (2004), the fact that this victimisation is part of the routine of the victim's daily experience makes the victimisation more, rather than, less serious. Consequently, Islamophobic victimisation can place a potentially huge emotional burden on actual and potential victims. From this perspective, it can damage their confidence and feelings of public safety far more than 'ordinary' crimes.

Given that they are targeted because of the visibility of their Muslim identity (which is easily identifiable because they wear the veil), veiled Muslim women who have experienced Islamophobia are unable to take comfort in the belief that what happened to them was simply random and 'could have happened to anyone'. Rather, they are forced to view this victimisation as an attack on their Muslim identity. At the same time though, one of the key characteristics of Islamophobic victimisation is its apparent randomness amongst 'visible' Muslims. Drawing on Perry's (2001) work on hate crime, it could be said that the identity of the individual victim is potentially irrelevant as the victim is likely to be chosen on the basis of their 'visible' membership in the Muslim community rather than any individual

characteristics. Viewed from this perspective, victims are often interchangeable on the premise that they represent the Muslim 'Other'.

Relatedly, Perry (2001) highlights that targeted victimisation is directed toward the community and not simply the individual victim. In this sense, the intent of the act is to subordinate and intimidate not only the victim but also the entire community to which the victim belongs. This type of targeted violence can be seen as a 'message' which is designed to tell the wider Muslim community that they are 'unwelcome' and ''don't belong'', thereby extending the impact of this victimisation beyond the actual, immediate victim to instil fear in the whole of the targeted community (Chakraborti and Garland, 2009). In particular, Perry and Alvi (2012) note that the perpetrator is sending a 'message' to four distinct audiences. First, to the peer group, that needs to be assured that the perpetrator is 'one of them', typically a straight, white, Christian male. Secondly, to the victim who needs to be punished for his or her inappropriate performance of identity. Thirdly, to the victim's community, who need to learn that they too are vulnerable to the same fate, that they 'don't belong' or 'aren't to be tolerated' and finally, to the broader community, who are reminded of the appropriate alignment of 'us' and 'them'.

As Perry (2001) observes in the context of hate crime, violence and the threat of violence – as a product of underlying social and cultural tensions – can simultaneously be used for punitive purposes and to ensure subordination. Following this line of argument, the use of violence by perpetrators enhances their authority in the eyes of the communities of both the victim and the offender. As such, violence is 'empowering' for its users as physical domination, especially in the public sphere, demonstrates a corresponding 'cultural mastery' (Perry, 2005). Ultimately, the perpetrator (male or female) becomes empowered and gains control through the use of violence. Accordingly, targeted violence provides a context in which the perpetrator can reassert his or her hegemonic identity, whilst at the same time, punishing the victim for the individual or collective performance of their identity (Perry and Alvi, 2012). This mechanism reaffirms the boundaries between dominant and subordinate groups by reminding the victim of their 'proper' place. This discussion emphasises the significance of the victim's

group identity, whereby manifestations of Islamophobia are conceptualised as ‘message crimes’ directed not simply toward the immediate victim, but also toward the wider Muslim community – as acts of violence or intimidation designed to spread fear and reinforce the hegemonic identity of the perpetrator and the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

3.6 The community impact of Islamophobic victimisation

As noted earlier, Islamophobic victimisation operates at two interwoven levels: the individual and the collective. At the individual level of victimisation, manifestations of Islamophobia endured by veiled Muslim women include having their veils forcibly torn or removed, and being verbally or physically attacked. This type of personal victimisation is linked to the suffering of Muslims in the UK at a general level and through reference to the *ummah* – the global community of Muslim believers – the suffering of Muslims worldwide (Mythen *et al.*, 2009). In other words, the impact of Islamophobic victimisation is not restricted to those individuals who might have been attacked; rather, the harm extends to the wider Muslim community on multiple levels: local, national and international. An appreciation of the concept of *ummah* and its implications has relevance for understanding the community impact of Islamophobic victimisation.

For Saunders (2008), the notion of *ummah* reframes the parameters of what defines national identity in Islam. Saunders (2008) points to the development of a robust collective identity amongst Muslims worldwide – one which cannot be adequately explained within the framework of religious fellowship. In essence, the *ummah* functions as a ‘nation’ which supersedes national and ethnic identities. As such, the term conveys the notion of ‘one community’ beyond geopolitical bounds. As Mandaville (2003: 135) put it, ‘Muslims living in diaspora – particularly in the West – are of varied and diverse ethnic origins. What links them together, however, is a shared sense of identity within their religion, an idea most clearly located within the concept of the *ummah*’. For Jacobson (1998), this identification is not necessarily connected to personal participation in distinctive religious practices in Islam. Even in cases where Muslims may not be practising Islam, they tend to emphasise their sense of belonging to the *ummah*.

Broadly speaking, non-Muslims tend to view the *ummah* as a religious community analogous to the Jews, Christians and Hindus; nevertheless, the term '*ummah*' is used in Arabic to denote the Western concept of 'nation' (Arabic: *al-Umam al-Muttahida*, 'the United Nations'). Saunders (2008) points out that membership in the *ummah* does not necessarily reject competing national identities (for example Arab or British) nor does this membership prevent internal divisions (for example Sunni versus Shia, moderate versus fundamentalist). Rather the ethnic, regional and linguistic differences that would have created divisions in a Muslim country are overshadowed by the shared difficulties of living as ethnic and religious minorities in the West.

In light of the fear and hostility generated by 9/11 and 7/7, the consequential backlash against Muslims worldwide has strengthened the concept of the *ummah* – particularly amongst those Muslims living outside the Muslim world. Accordingly, the notion of belonging to the *ummah* can be an expression of collective 'resistance' to the problem of Islamophobia. The persistence of popular debates in crystallising Muslims as permanent and essential 'others' has contributed to the emergence of an *ummah*-based community as a response to the current climate of Islamophobia in the West (Saunders, 2008). In a post-9/11 climate, membership in the *ummah* has become politicised on the basis that public, media and political debates routinely promote notions of a 'clash of civilisations' between Islam and the West.

Within this framework, specific incidents of Islamophobic victimisation can impact upon the Muslim community on a local, national and international level, especially in the case of violent attacks such as the murder of Marwa Ali El-Sherbini that clearly are of concern to Muslims internationally.[14] The death of El-Sherbini resulted in international reactions, with hundreds of Muslim protesters demonstrating in Egypt, Germany, Britain and other European countries against the rising Islamophobia in the West. Spalek

[14] In July 2009, Marwa Ali El-Sherbini, a 32-year-old Egyptian pharmacist, who was three months pregnant at the time, was stabbed to death in a German courtroom while preparing to give evidence against a German man of Russian descent who had tried to remove her headscarf and had called her an 'Islamist', 'terrorist' and 'whore' in a public park in Dresden, Germany (BBC, 2009b). Her husband, who was present in court, tried to save her but was also stabbed by the perpetrator and shot in the leg by a police officer who misidentified the assailant (BBC, 2009b).

(2008) suggests that the effects of a specific incident of victimisation may have far-reaching consequences through potentially re-awakening or radicalising a myriad of identities. In this context, an attack on a central part of victims' identity resonates deeply with their ideas about self, community and feelings of safety at micro level, and the emergence of group reactions at macro level.

Furthermore, the fear of Islamophobic victimisation acts as a form of emotional terrorism on the basis that it segregates and isolates Muslims in terms of restricting their access to specific public places and changing their patterns of social interaction. Tarlo (2007) notes the reluctance of both *hijab* and *niqab* wearers to visit areas in London where they are in a sartorial minority because they feel over-conspicuous, 'out of place', and potentially at an increased risk of attack. Taking a similar position, Mythen *et al.* (2009) suggest that the fear of abuse – in the street, in shops and on public transport – has restricted freedom of movement in the public sphere, particularly for veiled Muslim women. Whilst looking at women who have experienced homophobia or transphobia in London, Paterson *et al.* (2008) found that victims felt safer in their local area than they did in other public spaces. According to Perry and Alvi (2012), Islamophobic victimisation also limits the desire of actual and potential victims to interact with others, to the extent that they may choose to limit interactions with those 'like' their perpetrators.

This line of argument indicates that the fear of Islamophobic victimisation limits both the movements and social interactions of 'visible' Muslims, potentially resulting in withdrawal, isolation and ultimately segregation. For Perry and Alvi (2012), this is not a voluntary choice, but the 'safe' choice. Viewed from this perspective, Islamophobic victimisation can have a broad negative impact upon British society that does not apply with other types of conventional crime on the premise that it undermines the multicultural fabric of society (Iganski, 2001). Both individually and collectively, the threat of Islamophobic victimisation creates social and geographical yet 'invisible' boundaries across which members of the Muslim community are not 'welcome' to step. This symbiosis of the individual and the collective is crucial for understanding the nature and effects of Islamophobic

victimisation as well as the coping mechanisms that victims use to deal with it.

3.7 Victims' criminal justice responses

Having discussed the individual and collective harms of Islamophobic victimisation, the remaining section examines the ways in which victims respond to this victimisation. These responses may include the possibility of behavioural changes in the victim, changes in the victim's own self-perception and self-identity, and interactions that may occur between the victim and formal agencies, such as the police and courts, with whom the victim may come into contact as a result of this victimisation. Allen (2010b) observes that although the number of Islamophobic incidents is on the increase – particularly in the immediate aftermath of 'trigger' events – the vast majority of incidents remain unreported. From this premise, the issue of reporting Islamophobic victimisation becomes a critical one. The way in which the police deal with such incidents is particularly important as they are identified as 'signal crimes' which have a major effect on Muslim community perceptions of safety and security (Innes, Abbott, Lowe and Roberts, 2007). Choudhury and Fenwick (2011) note that in cases where Islamophobic victimisation is not taken seriously by the police, it undermines victims' trust and confidence in the police and criminal justice system as a whole.

In line with other forms of targeted violence, victims of Islamophobia are less likely to report their experiences to the police. Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) found that the overwhelming majority of victims had not reported the 'less serious' incidents. For example, typical incidents that had not been reported to the police included men spitting at Muslim women wearing *hijab* or *niqab* in London. Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) found that crime seriousness was the principal determinant of reporting anti-Muslim hate crimes in London. Christmann and Wong (2010) similarly claim that 'low-level' hate harassment is not considered serious enough by victims to report; however, in incidents that the victim sustains physical injury or if the loss is believed to be high, the benefits of informing the police are perceived

to be greater, as opposed to when only minor injury or loss, or no loss, is involved.[15]

The perceived seriousness of the incident is not the only reason for the victims' non-reporting behaviour. Cultural influences, whereby there is pressure from within the Muslim community not to involve outside agencies such as the police and courts, may prevent victims from reporting the incident(s). While not looking at victims of targeted victimisation specifically, Greenburg and Ruback (1992) found that social influence variables play an important role in victims' decision in terms of informing the authorities. Greenburg and Ruback (1992) note that the 'real' gatekeeper of the criminal justice system is neither the police nor the victim but instead those people whom the victim consults before making a decision about reporting the incident, such as relatives and friends. Additional reasons for non-reporting may include language barriers, with victims having insufficient grasp of English to feel confident enough to explain their situation to the police. Equally importantly, the age of the victim may play a key role in the victim's decision to report the incident or not.

Furthermore, several lines of evidence suggest that a crucial reason for non-reporting is a lack of confidence in the police. James and Simmonds (2013) point out that the police tend to treat hate incidents separately and therefore fail to gain the confidence of victims, by failing to recognise the process of racist victimisation that has occurred. Perry (2010) highlights the notion of police occupational culture, which reflects racist and homophobic attitudes (Reiner, 2000). Allen (2010b) argues that a high proportion of British Muslims perceive the police to be racist. Examples of the disproportionate use of stop and search powers[16] and the failure of the British police service to recruit and retain Muslims are cited as common reasons behind this

[15] According to Wong and Christmann (2008), the repeated occurrence of a non-violent, non-serious hate crime increases the likelihood of this type of incident being reported because the perpetrator would be more identifiable and thus, consequent action would be more likely to result in effective enforcement action in the minds of victims.

[16] Khan and Mythen (2008) claim that the use of stop and search powers – which have become a key part of the British Government's 'tough on terrorism' agenda – have produced tensions between Asian youths and the police in cities with large Muslim populations including London, Manchester and Birmingham. Taking a similar position, Mythen *et al.* (2009) note that the 'targeting' of people of Asian appearance in relation to stop and search practices has increased the level of distrust of British police.

observation. A lack of confidence in the police has also 'cut off' valuable sources of community information and intelligence, and has exacerbated community divisions thereby weakening social cohesion (Mythen *et al.,* 2009). Sharp and Atherton (2007) and Mythen *et al.* (2009) found relations between the police and Muslims to be strained, underpinned by a lack of confidence and trust, based on both lived experiences and previous exchanges with the police.[17] The 2004 report entitled *Islamophobia: Issues, Challenges and Action* by the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia revealed that Muslim women who had experienced Islamophobia were unlikely to report the incident(s) due to a lack of confidence in the police. A widespread distrust of the police and the judicial system was evident amongst *niqab* wearers who have been attacked in public places in France (Open Society Foundations, 2011).[18]

Whilst looking at women who have experienced homophobia and transphobia in London Paterson *et al.* (2008) found that victims were 'put off' by the visibility associated with reporting their victimisation to the police. For example, some victims were worried about other people finding out or the incident appearing in the media. In addition, some victims reported that they were discouraged by the thought of police procedures and going to court (Paterson *et al.,* 2008). Williams and Robinson (2004), whose research focused on victims of homophobia in Wales, found that the majority of victims did not report their experiences because they were fearful of 'secondary victimisation' from police officers. As Dignan (2004) observes, reporting an incident to the police sets in motion a range of other processes over which the victim has little or no control. These processes may inflict additional costs and further hardship on the victim; a consequence that is understood as 'secondary victimisation'.

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[17] Respondents in Mythen *et al.*'s (2009) study noted the routine forms of surveillance, scrutiny and intimidation that they had experienced at the hands of the police, thus highlighting an overall feeling that their treatment was based on suspicion of their 'Muslimness' rather than their actions.

[18] This study found that about half of the victims were not prepared to report a physical assault to the police. With respect to reporting verbal abuse, the majority of victims said that it was not worth pursuing since it would be difficult to prove and also, the police would not take them seriously (Open Society Foundations, 2011). A small minority of victims stated that they would not report any crime, believing in the supremacy of *Allah*'s jurisdiction over that of a non-Islamic state (Open Society Foundations, 2011).

Although the reasons for non-reporting are diverse and specific to each victim, it is clear that low levels of trust and confidence in the police contribute to the under-reporting of Islamophobic victimisation. The effect is to exacerbate the 'invisibility' of this victimisation to front-line law enforcers and criminal justice practitioners. This reality also highlights the difficulty of assessing or quantifying the scale of Islamophobic victimisation in the UK. Taking into consideration that trust and confidence in the police and the criminal justice system promote social integration and contribute to the successful application of the model of community cohesion, the need to dismantle barriers between the police and victims of Islamophobia becomes apparent. What follows discusses the way in which victims' multiple identities are affected by experiences of Islamophobia in the public sphere and closes with the main conclusions of the review of the literature.

3.8 Identity management

Islamophobic victimisation can shape individuals' self-identities, leading to a significant number of individuals who were nominally Muslim to claim Muslim identities for themselves more vigorously (Spalek, 2008). Consequently, 'Islam' may become a more salient and important marker of identity in response to experiences of Islamophobic victimisation. Moreover, an experience of Islamophobic victimisation may not only lead to the reinforcement of Muslim identities but also impact upon the way in which individuals express their 'Muslimness', including their political opinions, body presentation and dress (Mythen *et al*., 2009). Within this framework, an experience of Islamophobic victimisation, may serve to re-awaken hitherto hidden Muslim identities.

Castells (2004) observes that victims may develop 'resistance identities' which involve the formation of defensive groups, constructing individual or collective forms of resistance to oppression. Following this line of argument, a victim may undergo a process of radicalisation in the aftermath of their victimisation, where radicalisation can be understood as adopting a more politicised stance (Spalek, 2006). Under this idea, a victim of Islamophobia may join a group which campaigns peacefully for social change. At the same time, actual and potential victims may join extremist groups that advocate the

use of violence in order to defend 'Islam' (Spalek, 2006). Although this behaviour may be relatively uncommon, it shows that one should not dichotomise too rigidly between 'victims' and 'offenders' when considering how victims respond to victimisation. As Dignan (2004: 29) points out, 'victims and offenders often belong to overlapping categories rather than the mutually exclusive camps to which they tend to be assigned by popular stereotypes'.

These observations indicate that victims' responses may include a politicisation of aspects of their identities and forming resistance identities. At the same time though, victims' responses may include downplaying or perhaps denying parts of their self so as to reduce the potential risk for victimisation, which may lead to the 'invisibility' of certain identities (Spalek, 2008). As Perry and Alvi (2012: 16) observe, targeted violence often results in a careful crafting of victims' self-identities so that 'they are less visible, and thus less vulnerable'. By this line of thinking, actual and potential victims may attempt to make themselves as 'invisible' as possible to try and reduce the potential for abuse. Given this, a decision not to veil so as to hide one's Muslim identity, a decision to reduce travel by foot and public transport, and a decision to avoid visiting specific public places, are all ways of trying to reduce the risk and manage the fear of Islamophobic victimisation. Whilst looking at women who have experienced homophobia or transphobia in London, Paterson *et al*. (2008) found that half of the victims had changed their behaviour or appearance in order to avoid future attacks.

Mythen *et al*. (2009) found that visible and audible differences such as dress, language and skin colour increase the risk of becoming a victim of Islamophobia. Participants in this study revealed downplaying their 'Muslimness' by modifying or removing traditional clothing (the *niqab* for women and the *jubba* for men), wearing Western clothing, speaking in English and reducing the use of Urdu in certain public places (Mythen *et al.*, 2009). Afshar (2008) points out that some Muslims have been driven to adopt Western names and pretend not to be Muslims at all. Correspondingly, some Muslim organisations advised their members to keep a low profile and for Muslim women to refrain from veiling in public places post-9/11 (Allen and Nielsen, 2002). Similarly, after the 7/7 bombings Muslim leaders advised

women to remove their veils, fearing possible reprisals against them (Braybrooke, 2011). This line of evidence demonstrates that a common way of avoiding Islamophobic victimisation may be to appear less 'Muslim' and more 'Westernised', even though there is little or no internal acceptance of the latter identity.

On a positive note, experiences of Islamophobic victimisation might act as a catalyst for positive change. According to Perry and Alvi (2012), patterns of persistent violence as well as highly publicised cases often have the unintended effect of mobilising victim communities and their allies. Participants in Mythen *et al.*'s (2009) study expressed their desire to subvert the negative phenomenon of Islamophobic victimisation (which they believed to result from public misconceptions about Islam and Muslims) by engaging in a positive exercise of social tuition in Islamic religion, culture and politics. This shows that experiences of Islamophobic victimisation may encourage both direct and indirect victims to challenge ignorance and misunderstandings about Islam and Muslims. However, other participants in Mythen *et al.*'s (2009) study rejected the idea of having an educative role, particularly when confronted by individuals with monolithic views of Islam.

Ultimately, it is important to recognise that there is no single Muslim community and certainly no single monolithic Muslim experience of Islamophobic victimisation. The notion of *ummah* is an example of heterogeneity in Islam. An understanding of the different layers of identity surrounding the core identity of *ummah* has significance for understanding veiled Muslim women's responses to Islamophobic victimisation. At the same time, the experiences and effects of Islamophobic victimisation are likely to be shaped by a range of characteristics including gender, age, race, ethnicity, education and socio-economic status, to name but some. Recognising the interplay of different aspects of victims' identities with other personal, social and situational factors is crucial to understanding the individual and collective harms of Islamophobic victimisation.

3.9 Conclusion

The review of the literature suggests that veiled Muslim women are particularly vulnerable to public manifestations of Islamophobia in public. In this regard, attention has been drawn to the fact that Islamophobic victimisation is highly 'gendered'. From this premise, gender precipitates manifestations of Islamophobia on the basis that the visibility of the veil, coupled with popular perceptions of gender oppression in Islam, marks veiled Muslim women as 'uniquely' vulnerable to verbal and physical attacks in public places. Chapter One demonstrated that Islamophobia is not a distinctly post-9/11 phenomenon, but one which evolved out of Orientalism. It was argued that both colonial and contemporary stereotypes of Islam and Muslims have promoted the construction of the Muslim as 'Other' to the non-Muslim Self. Crucially in this context, a common image that resides in perceptions of Muslim women (particularly if wearing the veil) is the image of the oppressed female body. Chapter Two challenged popular stereotypes through showing the heterogeneity behind women's choices in covering in Islam. For example, motives behind the practice of veiling may include religious commitment, protection from the male gaze, access to the public sphere and wearing the veil as a fashion accessory. It was argued that veiled Muslim women's identities interact with other identifications based on everyday experiences of gender, age, race, ethnicity, education, socio-economic status and space.

Chapter Three explored the significance of the targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women. In doing so, the chapter examined some of the most relevant research studies of hate motivated victimisation in the UK and the US. It was argued that Islamophobic victimisation can have significant and ongoing consequences for actual and potential victims, both individually and collectively. Similarly with other forms of targeted violence, victims of Islamophobia are less likely to report such incidents to the police due to a lack of confidence in the police. The chapter also examined victims' responses to manifestations of Islamophobia in public. It was argued that victims might deny the existence or prevalence of this phenomenon and concentrate instead on downplaying or concealing their adherence to Islam in the hope that this will reduce the risk of future attacks. Alternatively,

persistent experiences of Islamophobic victimisation may re-awaken hitherto hidden Muslim identities. The next chapter focuses upon exploring key methodological questions when researching the victimisation of veiled Muslim women.

Chapter Four
Research Methods

4.1 Introduction

As outlined in previous chapters, relatively little is known about veiled Muslim women's lived experiences despite their vulnerability as victims of Islamophobia. Against this background, the present study aims to improve knowledge of their targeted victimisation, which is all too often 'hidden' from academic enquiry. Chapter Four presents the methodology of this study and describes the nature of qualitative research in relation to the form that the research strategy employed: qualitative interviewing and ethnography. A key component was the process of conducting semi-structured interviews with veiled Muslim women, key stakeholders and policy-makers in Leicester. Such an approach allowed for a more robust examination of the current research aims and objectives, namely, to shed light on the nature and impact of this victimisation. In framing the lines of enquiry of the research, emphasis was given to eliciting information from veiled Muslim women from different backgrounds in order to provide as informed and full a picture as possible. The chapter discusses the similarities and differences between the researcher and the researched which are framed by notions of 'insider' and 'outsider' status. It will be argued that being an 'outsider' can benefit the research process by enabling the researcher to elicit comprehensive responses whilst, at the same time, maintaining a critical distance from the data.

4.2 Research aims and objectives

The methodology used for this study is comprised of the following strands: individual and focus group interviews with veiled Muslim women who have been victims of Islamophobia in public; individual interviews with local key stakeholders and policy-makers from organisations such as the Police, Victim Support, Witness Service, Crown Prosecution Service, Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County Council as well as local faith-based

organisations; and an ethnographic approach whereby I wore the veil in public places in Leicester.

The purpose of the study was to shed light on the experiences of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia in public places in Leicester and elsewhere. Phillips and Bowling (2003) argue that it is important to develop a 'minority perspective', one which articulates the distinct experiences of minority groups and takes into consideration their histories and identities. However, minority victimisation – and the difficulties of examining the needs and experiences of 'hard to reach' groups – has received relatively little attention within criminological discourses. For example, veiled Muslim women are rarely included within studies of victimisation despite their increased levels of vulnerability in public – a factor which in itself exacerbates their marginalisation from both academic discourses and mainstream society. Moreover, the need for researching Islamophobia has become more urgent in a post-9/11 climate on the basis that Muslims in general and veiled Muslim women in particular are often perceived as 'ideal' targets of Islamophobic attacks. Popular perceptions of veiled Muslim women as submissive, oppressed and subjugated render them 'easy' and 'soft' targets to attack thereby increasing their vulnerability in public places. This aspect of the research study becomes even more important in the wake of legislation banning the *niqab* in public places in European countries such as France, Belgium and Italy. Within this framework, the main research questions are as follows:

1. What is the nature of Islamophobic victimisation directed towards veiled Muslim women in public places in Leicester and elsewhere?
2. What is the impact of this victimisation upon veiled Muslim women, their families and wider Muslim communities?
3. What are the factors that constrain or facilitate the reporting of this victimisation?
4. What coping strategies are used by victims and their families in response to their experiences of Islamophobia?

4.3 The sample

The study is based on field research conducted in the city of Leicester between 2011 and 2012. It comprised of 60 individual interviews and 20 focus group interviews with veiled Muslim women, 15 individual interviews with key stakeholders and policy-makers, and ethnography. Of the 60 veiled Muslim women who took part in individual interviews[19], 50 (83 per cent) were born into Islam and 10 (17 per cent) had converted to Islam whilst the largest ethnic group of participants classified themselves as Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Asian other – 42, 70 per cent), followed by Black (either Black Caribbean, Black African, and Black Other – 8, 13 per cent), and White (British, Irish, and Other – 10, 17 per cent). Participants' age ranged from 17 to 72 years. At the time of the fieldwork, the veiled Muslim women who took part in the study were residents living in Leicester. In particular, the majority of participants (40, 67 per cent) had lived in Leicester for five years or more.

Leicester is located at the heart of the East Midlands of England. The 2011 Census puts the population of Leicester at approximately 330,000. Leicester residents hail from over 50 countries from across the globe, making the city one of the most ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse places in the UK.[20] The latest Census figures reveal that 45.1 per cent of the city's residents are White British, 5.5 are 'Other' White groups, 28.3 per cent are Asian/Asian British Indian, 2.4 per cent are Asian/Asian British Pakistani, 6.4 are 'Other' Asian/Asian British groups, 6.2 per cent are Black African/Caribbean/Black British, 3.5 per cent are from Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups and 3 per cent are from 'Other' ethnic groups. This diversity is further reflected in the variety of religious and secular traditions and identities in the city: 32.4 per cent are Christian, 22.8 per cent are of 'no religion', 18.6 per cent are Muslim, 15.2 per cent are Hindu, 4.4 per cent are Sikh, 0.6 per cent follow 'Other' religions, 0.2 are Buddhist and 0.1 are Jewish.[21] In relation to religious affiliation, Christians remain the largest group, followed by those

[19] It is not possible to provide any demographic information about the veiled Muslim women who took part in the focus group interviews because in some cases I was not allowed by the relevant gatekeepers to note participants' personal details.
[20] Refer to Appendix One for charts showing the distribution of Leicester's population by broad ethnic and religious groups in Leicester in 2011.
[21] Also, 5.6 per cent did not state their religion.

with ‘no religion’ whilst those affiliated with the Muslim religion are the third largest group.

In light of its diverse mix of cultures and faiths, Leicester is commonly depicted as the reflection of a modern, vibrant, multi-cultural city and as the UK’s most ethnically harmonious city. As such, Leicester is seen as a successful model of multiculturalism both nationally and internationally. As one of the most diverse cities in the UK, Leicester offers the ideal site in which to conduct this study. A key reason for deciding to focus on the city of Leicester is its high Muslim population. In particular, Leicester is home to a large number of Muslim women who wear the *niqab*. Also, a contributing factor to this decision is a personal awareness of the problem of Islamophobia as observed within my previous employment context as a support worker at Victim Support in Leicester.

Correspondingly, the first batch of individual interviews with veiled Muslim women was secured through pre-existing contacts at Victim Support. Participants were either direct contacts – namely, veiled Muslim women who I knew in my role as a support worker at Victim Support or indirect contacts – namely, veiled Muslim women who were contacted by other victims of Islamophobia that I had supported at Victim Support. The second batch of individual interviews was secured through the Federation of Muslim Organisations, which is a regional umbrella body for Muslim organisations in Leicestershire.

This approach is understood as ‘convenience sampling’, which is a non-probability sampling technique whereby subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility to the researcher (Maxfield and Babbie, 2009). However, whilst advantageous in terms of its capacity to reveal networks of contacts to be studied, this approach included only those veiled Muslim women within the network of Victim Support and the Federation of Muslim Organisations, and therefore failed to locate those veiled Muslim women who would not have had contact with these organisations. Therefore, additional steps were taken to access potential participants who may have remained unidentified by these organisations, and this helped to broaden the sample at least to some extent. For example, I attended a number of social events for Muslim women in Leicester in order to raise awareness about the study

amongst Muslim women in the local community and identify prospective participants while additional assistance in securing access to participants came from the Student Islamic Societies at the local universities, the University of Leicester and De Montfort University respectively.

The sampling strategy also included snowball sampling. This sampling technique refers to participants accrued through referral from other individuals who had already taken part in the study. As with convenience sampling, snowball sampling is a type of non-probability method, which is particularly appropriate when the population of interest is 'hidden' or 'hard to reach' and there is a lack of sampling frame of the target group (Patton, 1987). Indeed, the majority of participants were accessed through this form of sampling. Moreover, the methodology included focus group interviews with victims. In the absence of any identifiable, 'ready-made' samples of veiled Muslim women who have been victims of Islamophobia in public, this method proved to be the most feasible way of locating a diverse group of participants. This ensured that there was a good variety in the resulting sample so that veiled Muslim women differed from each other not only in terms of key characteristics such as age, race, ethnicity, education and socio-economic status but also in terms of their views, attitudes and experiences of Islamophobic victimisation.

Lastly, interviews were also undertaken with individuals from a selection of organisations that have some degree of responsibility for policy-making and service provision for the Muslim community in Leicester. Individual interviews with key stakeholders and policy-makers from local organisations such as the Police, Victim Support, Witness Service, Crown Prosecution Service, Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County Council as well as local faith-based organisations were secured through pre-existing contacts at Victim Support as well as through contacting some of these organisations directly in order to arrange an interview with those individuals who were working in the field of hate crime. Assessing the perceptions of key stakeholders was regarded as an important feature of the research that would enable those who took part in the study to share their views regarding the quality of available services, whilst providing insights into the realities of the nature and effects of Islamophobic victimisation. This approach was

supplementary to examining the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia. The use of stakeholder interview data was relatively limited within the analysis chapters compared to women's interviews; however, this was a deliberately choice that I made because my focus was on getting the 'lost' voices of veiled Muslim women 'heard'.

4.4 Employing a qualitative research framework

While quantitative methods can provide useful statistical context, they can be regarded as 'superficial' in their coverage of sensitive and complex issues such as the targeted victimisation of 'hard to reach' groups. A qualitative approach recognises the dynamic nature of targeted victimisation and the wider social processes that give rise to this victimisation. It takes into account the perspective of the people being interviewed, establishes a high level of rapport and trust between the interviewer and the interviewees, and promotes a non-hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched. Quantitative methods fail to capture the process of targeted victimisation because they provide only narrowly focused snapshots of behaviour, actions and perceptions. As such, a quantitative approach would have been insufficiently sensitive to explore the targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women.

In particular, the distinctiveness of qualitative research is premised on three key characteristics: it is inductivist, interpretivist, and constructionist. One of the main features of qualitative research is an inductive view of the relationship between theory and research, whereby theory is generated out of the research findings. Indeed, the framework which was used to guide the analysis of data in the present study was grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss (1967), where themes were allowed to emerge from the data, thereby enabling theories about the nature of Islamophobic victimisation to be generated, tested and refined during the analytical process. Within a grounded theory framework, inductive reasoning moved from a set of particular observations with reference to the lived experiences of participants as victims of Islamophobia to the discovery of a pattern of targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women, which was theoretically based upon these observations. While this process of induction enabled me to develop an

enhanced theoretical understanding of the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women based upon the observations from the qualitative material, some of theories and explanations which emerged over the course of the research spurred the collection of further data in order to test these theories. This strategy of oscillation between testing emerging theories and collecting data facilitates an interplay between interpretation and theorising, on the one hand, and data collection, on the other. Such an approach is referred to as an iterative one (Maxfield and Babbie, 2009).

With the exception of one individual[22], the rest of participants consented to their interviews being recorded, and the material was subsequently transcribed and analysed by the researcher. The process of transcribing the extensive amount of qualitative material elicited from individual and focus group interviews was an integral part of the analysis in terms of increasing my familiarity with the data whilst, at the same time, allowing me to identify key themes emerging from the data. Within a grounded theory framework, the data was reviewed and coded in order to produce categories consistent with issues of thematic interest. Nvivo 9, which is a qualitative analysis software package, was used to code the data under broad themes of Islamophobic victimisation, and then patterns and sub-themes were identified within broad themes such as the nature, frequency and impact of Islamophobic victimisation, victims' coping mechanisms and prevention of Islamophobic victimisation. These sub-themes were used to identify and inform the topics in the next three chapters. Moreover, verbatim quotes of what interviewees said were used to illustrate key themes and patterns in the data but also to enable readers to assess the validity of the analysis against what had been said. In this regard, transcript extracts not only constitute evidence for the current findings but also help readers to understand how participants made sense of their victimisation, how they had been affected and how they coped with it.

Furthermore, an epistemological position described as interpretivist highlights the preference for 'seeing through the eyes of the people being studied' and 'in their own setting', which indicates a naturalistic stance

[22] One of the women refused for the individual interview to be recorded and therefore I offered to take notes, which was accepted by this participant.

(Bryman, 2008). This was achieved through the use of an ethnographic approach whereby I wore the veil in public places in Leicester. Clearly, the ethnographic fieldwork helped the interpretation of the data in terms of understanding participants' experiences as victims of Islamophobia and recognising how 'low-level' Islamophobic victimisation was embedded within their lives. Finally, an ontological position described as constructionist suggests that social properties are not 'phenomena out there' but outcomes of the interactions between the researcher and the researched (Bryman, 2008). Symbolic interactionism suggests that the process of understanding social phenomena is not undertaken by individuals in isolation from each other but occurs in interaction with others (Bryman, 2008). This point is explored further in due course in the context of outlining the similarities and differences between the researcher and the researched.

4.5 Methodology in action: individual interviews

Qualitative interviewing provided the study with detailed and diverse insights of veiled Muslim women's lived experiences as victims of Islamophobia as well as information about the nature, effects and prevention of this victimisation. This was achieved through individual and focus group interviews with veiled Muslim women, and individual interviews with local key stakeholders and policy-makers. Individual, in-depth interviews allow for 'rich' or 'thick' data to be collected with detailed descriptions (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011). It is especially valuable for providing the information in sufficient depth and attuning it to the varying levels of comprehension present in the target population (Curtis and Curtis, 2011).

Individual interviews are used primarily when researching sensitive issues that require confidentiality and a more intimate setting for data collection, and this is especially appropriate for a 'hard to access' group such as veiled Muslim women. In comparison to focus groups, individual interviews can be easier to manage as the interviewer can focus on one person (Bryman, 2008). This allows for easier rapport-building in the sense that the participant may be more willing to share personal information, and there is also more time to pursue interesting areas without other participants interrupting. In the context of this particular piece of research, I found that

participants were more likely to share emotionally intense information about their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation during individual interviews rather than focus group interviews. Individual interviews can also be useful in terms of understanding the economic, socio-cultural and religious context of the target population (Hennink *et al*., 2011). This contributes to capturing people's individual voices and stories whilst taking into account their lifestyle.

The interviews conducted for the purposes of this research were semi-structured, and tailored to meet the specific requirements of each particular interview, with respect to both veiled Muslim women and stakeholders.[23] Semi-structured interviewing is flexible in terms of changing the order of interview questions, following up interesting points raised by interviewees, including material that the participants brought up that the interviewer might not have anticipated, and clearing up inconsistencies in answers (Maxfield and Babbie, 2009). Correspondingly, questions and themes were added or adapted as the study progressed. For example, questions were added concerning the issue of experiencing racist harassment based on women's racial background prior to wearing the veil. Gradually the following question emerged: 'Have you experienced any form of racism prior to wearing the *niqab*?' Relatedly, the piloting of interviews proved valuable in testing the appropriateness and robustness of the questions. After a pilot study of 12 individuals, I realised that I should avoid using any academic terminology that the participants might not have been familiar with.

4.6 Methodology in action: focus groups

In addition to individual interviews, the methodology included 20 focus group interviews with veiled Muslim women who have experienced incidents of Islamophobic victimisation in public places in Leicester and elsewhere. Focus group interviews incorporate the strengths of qualitative research in terms of gathering 'rich' data whilst generating additional insights through group interactions (Curtis and Curtis, 2011). In the context of this particular piece of research, focus group interviews were used to capture the importance of interactions between the participants, particularly to generate conversation

[23] Refer to Appendix Two for a copy of the interview schedule for veiled Muslim women, and to Appendix Three for a copy of the interview schedule for practitioners.

on their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation. The focus group method afforded the possibility of open discussion amongst veiled Muslim women with similar or different experiences of Islamophobic victimisation whilst, at the same time, highlighting collectively held beliefs and attitudes. As such, the focus group interviews allowed participants' perspectives to be revealed in ways that were different from individual interviews, particularly in terms of allowing the voices of veiled Muslim women to be heard collectively. In this regard, participating in a focus group setting might be a rare opportunity for veiled Muslim women to empower themselves by making sense of their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation.

Focus groups are seen as less artificial in comparison to individual interviews since group interaction is a 'normal' part of social life (Bryman, 2008). This was achieved by organising focus group sessions at mosques, Islamic centres and Islamic educational institutions, which could be seen as a 'normal' part of a practising Muslim woman's lifestyle. In light of this, an important issue to consider is the ideal number of focus group participants. The typical group size is usually six to ten members although smaller groups are recommended when participants are likely to have a lot to say on the research topic. Maxfield and Babbie (2009) recommend smaller groups when the topic is controversial or complex, and when collecting interviewees' personal accounts is significant for the purposes of the research, whilst larger groups are recommended when participants have little involvement with the research topic or when the focus group researcher wants to hear numerous brief suggestions.

In the context of this particular piece of research, members of the focus group sessions varied from six to 20 individuals. To some extent, the number of veiled Muslim women who participated in the focus group interviews was out of my control. As already mentioned, I conducted these interviews at local Muslim organisations such as mosques, Islamic centres and Islamic educational institutions. The focus group participants were already at these premises for religious purposes such as praying and learning or teaching the *Quran*. Most groups were already established in certain classes and participants would either take some time off their classes to participate in a focus group interview or they would join in the next session as soon as they

finished their activities. Moreover, I was conscious of the fact that most participants had other responsibilities including picking up their children from school and taking care of elderly family members. This meant that their availability was stretched and thus I did not want to put pressure on them by being strict on the size of the focus groups or which specific group they could take part in.

At the beginning of the fieldwork, I was not sure whether to use 'natural' groups (as was ultimately the case) or to select individuals who were unknown to each other. On the one hand, the fact that participants knew each other and also shared certain characteristics (such as the wearing of the veil) increased the likelihood of good group dynamics. As Flick (2006) notes, employing natural groups ensures that the discussion is more 'natural' through the use of members of 'pre-existing groups'. Within this study, this approach eased the process of building rapport, and encouraged honest and open discussions amongst participants. Prior to conducting the focus group interviews, I explained to potential participants that 'they could say as much or as little as they wanted', which took the pressure off them feeling 'forced' to share their experiences. Moreover, I highlighted that there were no correct or incorrect answers; rather, I was interested in their views, feelings and experiences. However, it is possible that some participants might have felt unable to talk freely in this setting. In light of this, I offered to arrange individual interviews for those women who could not (or presumably did not want) to take part in a focus group session but none of the focus group participants asked for an individual interview. Finally, one of the main criticisms of using natural groups is the possibility of people who know each other well to operate with taken-for-granted assumptions that they feel do not need to be made explicit (Curtis and Curtis, 2011). Although this criticism is legitimate, pre-existing styles of familiarity and interaction did not 'contaminate' the focus group interviews in this study. In light of my non-Muslim background participants were very explicit and clear in their answers with the view of 'educating' me about Islam, Muslims and the veil.

4.7 Methodology in action: ethnography

In addition to individual and focus group interviews, the study also included an ethnographic element, which involved wearing the veil in public places in Leicester. This aspect of the research was conducted over set periods of time during the daytime only. As such, it was a complementary approach to the study which provided insights beyond the scope of a more conventional approach. It is interesting to note that ethnography was not part of my original methodology; rather, it was during the pilot interviews that participants advised me to wear the veil in order to see for myself the level of abuse and hostility that they suffered on a daily basis. Initially, I did face personal doubts and ethical dilemmas in terms of adopting the Muslim code of dress mainly for fear of offending Islam and Muslims by wearing the veil as a non-Muslim woman. However, I decided to wear the veil after having sought advice from various members of the local Muslim community who assured me that this 'experiment' would not offend either Islam or Muslims.

In total, I wore the veil for four weeks as part of my daily routine in public places in the city of Leicester such as streets, shopping centres and public means of transport. Although my aim was to be 'natural' in terms of visiting places that I would normally visit, for example, when doing my shopping in Leicester city centre, I decided not to wear the veil if it was late at night (mainly for safety reasons). The setting of public space was an open setting, which means that I assumed a covert role since I did not disclose the fact that I was a researcher to members of the public. This approach carries both advantages and risks. On the one hand, using a covert role meant that members of the public were not aware of my status as a researcher and as a result they could behave naturally in front of me. This covert role was essential to the success of the ethnographic research. It is highly likely that people's awareness of my status as a researcher would influence how they treated me, which would potentially mask the true dimensions of public expressions of Islamophobic prejudice.

On the other hand, the ethnographic part of the study was fraught with difficulties, and indeed in certain circumstances with danger. After wearing the veil for a few days I felt that I was under constant threat and as a result I had to be alert all the time whilst wearing the veil in public. The various

situations that I encountered because of my perceived Muslim identity placed me in situations of, perhaps, inevitable verbal abuse and potential physical attacks, situations that were probably 'normal' for both victims and perpetrators. I encountered public expressions of hostility such as persistent staring, angry looks, being ignored, Islamophobic comments such as 'Terrorist', 'Muslim bomber' and 'Go back to Afghanistan', and as a result, I felt vulnerable to physical attacks, particularly when the streets were not crowded.

Also, there were times that I felt a strong sense of *deja vu*. This means that I witnessed situations – for example, groups of white young men shouting 'Ninja' – which have been described as everyday incidents by participants. I found myself having to contend with the emotional effects such as fear, anger and depression as well as physical symptoms including loss of appetite and difficulty in sleeping. Also, there were days that I felt reluctant to leave my house. Although these effects were short-lived it is only in hindsight that I am able to recognise the dangers involved. At the time of conducting the ethnographic part of the research, I consciously downplayed the seriousness of the situation to my PhD supervisors, departmental colleagues and friends because I feared that I would be prevented from completing this part of the research. The value of potentially putting myself at risk was premised on the insights into the victimisation of veiled Muslim women that ethnography provided me with, which would not have been possible had I not worn the veil myself. However, it is important to note that if I were at immediate risk of harm I would have contacted the police immediately.

Throughout the ethnographic element of the research, I kept a diary in order to write my reflections. However, I noticed that the feelings that I felt and the experiences of Islamophobic victimisation that I suffered were the same kind of feelings and experiences that were relayed countless times by the veiled Muslim women who took part in this study. As such, my feelings, emotions and experiences of Islamophobic victimisation were depicted very vividly through the veiled Muslim women's voices. In addition, my focus was on getting veiled Muslim women's voices heard as opposed to my own voice and experiences. Rather than using my own descriptions and my own words, I focused on conveying the words of the veiled Muslim women who took part

in the study. Rather than introducing new data the ethnographic element confirmed and provided me with a vivid picture of what veiled Muslim women go through because of the visibility of their Muslim identity.

Clearly, the ethnographic fieldwork helped the interpretation of the data in terms of understanding veiled Muslim women's experiences as victims of Islamophobia and recognising how 'low-level' Islamophobic victimisation is embedded within their lives. In light of my occupational background (as a criminologist and as a support worker at Victim Support), I was aware of the nature of Islamophobic victimisation. Moreover, as an individual who had not experienced any form of hate crime to date, I was more likely to notice and therefore report on behaviour that seemed 'unusual' to me such as persistent staring or a sense of being ignored. However, after a period of time, those same behaviours ceased to be seen as unusual and became instead 'normal'; thus I felt that I did not need to record them as such. This is why it was important that ethnography in this context was limited in terms of the time frame.

Bringing ethnographic research to a close is not an easy or straightforward task. The unstructured nature of ethnographic research coupled with the absence of specific hypotheses to be tested means that there is often a tendency for ethnographic research to lack a sense of an obvious end point (Bryman, 2008). In this study, the decision for disengagement was difficult but the demands of my employment allied with the need to write up my thesis necessitated withdrawal from the field. Initially, I did find it difficult to stop wearing the veil because of the anonymity that the veil provided me with. Based on my fieldwork experience, wearing the veil was like wearing an 'invisible cloak'. As such, I understood the veil as a tool of emancipation on the basis that it liberated me from society's expectations of how women should behave and dress. Also, I saw the veil as a form of liberation from the sexualisation of women in Western society and the Western standards of attractiveness.

4.8 Researcher subjectivities

4.8.1 Mapping the insider and outsider positions

It is important to acknowledge my status as a white, Orthodox Christian female researcher documenting veiled Muslim women's lived experiences of Islamophobic victimisation. This enables us to reflect on the relevance of core intersectional aspects of my identity such as religion, gender and race in order to evaluate how knowledge is produced in the context of researcher subjectivities. Spalek (2005) points out that when the researcher holds different racial, religious and cultural positions from the researched, he or she must be aware that due to their wish to establish rapport with the participants, they might be overlooking crucial aspects of participants' lived experiences; aspects which are linked to racial, religious and cultural power hierarchies of which the researcher may be a part. Garland, Spalek and Chakraborti (2006) argue that although some aspects of the researcher's self-identity may enable him or her to document the previously 'hidden' experiences of minority communities, other aspects of the researcher's self-identity can lead to the misrepresentation of those experiences, thereby serving to maintain and re-produce dominant power relations. This line of argument highlights the importance of the researcher's 'insider' or 'outsider' status and the extent to which an outsider position can lead to the misrepresentation of participants' lived experiences.

It is important to draw the parameters of the insider and outsider debate. The notion of 'insider' suggests that researchers who are members of minority groups have privileged access to knowledge about the experiences of these groups because of the researcher's minority status. Researchers are perceived as 'outsiders' when interviewing individuals from different ethnic, religious or cultural groups. In essence, research which is undertaken by 'outsiders' tends to be critiqued for failing to comprehend and accurately represent the experiences of members of minority groups. Under this idea, insiders have greater awareness and understanding of minority issues in comparison to outsiders and thus they can provide accounts of minority experiences which are genuine and legitimate. From this perspective, an insider researcher is better positioned because of his or her knowledge of the relevant patterns of social interaction required for gaining

access, increasing participants' willingness to disclose personal and sensitive information, and making meaning. This line of argument suggests that the researcher must be part of the minority group he or she is researching in order to truly understand participants' experiences, particularly when researching disadvantaged or disempowered communities such as religious and ethnic minorities.

4.8.2 Access

Being an insider can hold many advantages, particularly in terms of gaining access for qualitative interviewing. This aspect of the research process is important because how access is gained and granted influences the data collection including establishing rapport between the researcher and the researched. Indeed, the gatekeepers and the participants themselves can deny access to outsider researchers. For example, participants might have assumptions regarding certain characteristics of the outsider researcher which ultimately obstruct access. In addition, they might be wondering 'why us' whilst resisting any scrutiny 'by anyone not on their side' (Shah, 2004). Clearly, 'getting in' or gaining access for qualitative interviewing can be challenging depending upon the perceptions of gatekeepers and participants regarding outsider researchers.

Despite my good contacts with members of the local Muslim community in Leicester, being a non-Muslim researcher meant that access to potential participants was not always guaranteed. However, engaging with local Muslim organisations eased access to participants despite my outsider status. Essentially, I received public demonstrations of 'approval' by relevant gatekeepers through promoting my study on their organisations' website. As Keval (2009) points out, gatekeepers wield considerable power in validating or rejecting identities. In this sense, having this partially validated identity made the rest of the fieldwork less problematic and gave 'the green light' to veiled Muslim women in the local community to agree to participate in the study.

Moreover, key informants such as veiled Muslim women from the local community played an important role in designing the fieldwork such as 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. Accordingly, I was advised to dress modestly, including wearing a long loose dress (preferably black) and covering my hair when conducting focus group sessions at mosques. In the context of researching minority communities, Phillips and Bowling (2003) argue that the involvement of members of these communities in all stages of the process increases the chances of making the correct fieldwork choices. This approach enables the researcher to break down any cultural, religious or racial barriers that may exist between the researcher and the researched (Garland *et al*., 2006).

However, although relevant contacts might be helpful in terms of gaining access and making appropriate fieldwork choices, the quality of interview data will still depend upon 'getting on' with the participants – a task which demands relevant knowledge and skills. Following this line of argument, agreeing to be interviewed is an initial phase that can be achieved through personal efforts, contacts or negotiations but 'getting on' with the participants could be problematic in the absence of insider's knowledge. In the words of Shah (2004: 569), 'Learning to be a good researcher, to avoid assumptions based on familiarity, and to bring a critical eye to the research context is a developmental process, but cultural knowledge is a matter of *habitus*, which cannot be acquired except by living'. Echoing the same viewpoint, Garland *et al*. (2006) argue that examining the needs and experiences of religious minority communities can be problematic, especially when the researcher holds a basic knowledge of the particular faith that participants identify with.

4.8.3 Religion

The previous discussion suggests that attempting to understand the impact of Islamophobia upon victims can be problematic, particularly when the researcher is an outsider. This line of argument raises the question of whether it is necessary for researchers to belong to the same religious group as their research participants. As already indicated, being an insider can be useful. However, one's outsider status can also benefit the research process. In this regard, my non-Muslim background proved to be of benefit to the

fieldwork rather than an obstacle. By being conscious of my outsider status, I used it as a tool through which to gain detailed and comprehensive accounts from participants, and ensure rigorous analysis by maintaining a critical distance from the data. In other words, I used my outsider status as a non-Muslim researcher and to this extent my lack of religious and cultural knowledge of Islam in order to gain 'rich' interview data.

Instead of trying to educate myself about issues regarding Islam and the veil outside of the interview context, I adopted a strategy of presenting myself as someone who was largely unfamiliar with these issues. Rather than downplaying my outsider status, I emphasised the differences between myself and the participants by confirming my non-Muslim background and used this as a means through which to elicit in-depth answers from them. Fielding (2008) argues that it can be useful to come across as somewhat naive and relatively ignorant so that participants describe their experiences to the researcher in detail. Accordingly, I explained to participants that I had very little knowledge about Islam and the practice of veiling, which encouraged them to take on the role of the 'educator'. In light of my apparent limited knowledge, participants were keen to describe central elements of their religion in relation to the veil and their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation, which placed them in the role of the 'experts'.

It is highly likely that this strategy of portraying religious and cultural ignorance on my part empowered participants by putting them in a position of authority. Tinker and Armstrong (2008) argue that putting less confident participants in a position of authority encourages them to talk more freely, thereby eliciting more detailed and comprehensive interview data. However, this 'uninformed outsider' position changed in the research process. After carrying out a number of individual and focus group interviews and having worn the veil myself as part of the ethnographic aspect of the research, I presented myself as an 'informed outsider' or perhaps as an insider, which also demonstrates the fluidity of inclusion or exclusion in the context of researcher subjectivities (Keval, 2009). Tinker and Armstrong (2008) propose that in this case it is best to maintain the uninformed outsider position but I felt that by denying my insider status, there was a risk of deceiving my participants. Therefore I decided to share my insider or informed outsider

status with my participants in order to relate more fully and in a more appreciative way with them.

Moreover, I used my non-Muslim background in order to minimise participants' fear of being judged. Research on interviewer effects indicates that some participants might speak more freely to an interviewer of a different ethnic, religious or social group (Tinker and Armstrong, 2008). Under this idea, participants may choose to withhold their views and experiences from a person who shares their value systems and therefore poses the risk of judging them negatively. Also, some individuals may choose not to disclose sensitive information to an interviewer of the same group because they fear that he or she might reveal elements of the interview to other members of their community (Tinker and Armstrong, 2008). This highlights the extent to which some participants may be reluctant to share sensitive information with a person who poses the possibility of being judgemental due to a shared knowledge of religion or culture. As a result, it might be easier for participants to share their views and experiences with a complete stranger who would disappear with the information rather than with a member of their own community.

Furthermore, my outsider status as a non-Muslim researcher allowed me to ask questions that a researcher from the same religious group might not have felt able to ask. Tinker and Armstrong (2008) highlight that the researchers' closeness to the subject of investigation can blunt their criticality, causing them to take for granted aspects which are familiar to them, and this can have implications for the interview process. This suggests that insider researchers might not ask questions that they feel are too insignificant or too obvious. Drawing on their insider status, these researchers are in a position of 'knowing' certain issues which means that such issues are not worth spelling out because they are to be taken for granted (Keval, 2009). For example, had a Muslim researcher asked 'Why do you wear the veil?' participants might have felt confused that the researcher, someone who shared their religion and knowledge of it, needed something so basic spelled out. This shows that questions posed by an insider researcher could have been met with limited responses on the basis that

participants might have felt that there is no need to explain their views and experiences of Islamophobic victimisation in detail.

With respect to the data analysis, the outsider researcher may bring analytical objectivity to the study. Under this idea, outsider researchers are not 'contaminated' by bias and prejudice, and as a result they are more objective than insider researchers. Perceiving oneself as holding similar values or beliefs to participants may lead the insider researcher to assume a particular interpretation of the data whilst a sense of distance will enable the outsider researcher to remain detached and view the data critically. Following this line of thought, an insider status might prevent researchers from approaching their data analysis with the necessary criticality because of their closeness to the subject of investigation. Ultimately, outsider researchers may bring a 'fresh' perspective to the topic under investigation.

4.8.4 Gender

Throughout interviews and focus group discussions, I was aware of my position as a white researcher and of the possibility that some participants might have seen me as the 'oppressor' on the basis of my ethnic and non-Muslim identity. Adler (2001) highlights that if participants perceive themselves as marginalised and vulnerably positioned by the white society, they might be reluctant to share information with a researcher who is 'one of them'. In this context, agreeing to be researched by a white researcher becomes a political decision which impacts upon the data made available to the outsider researcher. This decision may not necessarily be based upon the colour divide but upon what 'white' represents for black and South Asian communities that have been historically discriminated and racially abused based on their perceived 'difference' (Shah, 2004).

Consistent with this view, Phillips and Bowling (2003) argue that 'white' is the norm or standard against which ethnic minorities are to be judged while Spalek (2005) notes the normativity of 'whiteness' in this context, whereby being white is considered to be 'normal', 'neutral' and 'common-sense' rather than a racial identity and a particular lens through which the world is viewed and experienced. To complicate matters further many white, non-Muslim Western social commentators and journalists have promoted false images of

Islam and as a result some participants might have viewed me as being a part of this 'white, Western, establishment' (Spalek, 2005: 411). With this in mind, I decided to use an aspect of my identity that I could claim constituted 'the oppressed' – that is my gender.

In this sense, I used my gender identity to establish rapport and trust with the veiled Muslim women who took part in the study. Similarly, whilst documenting black Muslim women's experiences of victimisation and the management of their personal safety, Spalek (2002) drew upon her position as a woman in order to establish rapport, since her racial and religious identity differed from those of the research participants. This approach is based on the notion that there is a special woman-to-woman connection between female researchers and female participants, which encourages the latter to disclose sensitive information. The difficulties of using a male researcher for this kind of research should also be acknowledged. The principle of avoiding contact with 'non-*mahram*' 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 could disclose their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation to a male interviewer. This shows that being a female researcher was crucial in the present study.

4.8.5 Assessing the insider versus outsider positions

As already mentioned, the status of the researcher as an insider or outsider has great significance for all phases of the research process including access, data collection and making meaning, particularly in a qualitative research context. An improved understanding of both positions enables us to recognise benefits, limitations and to develop informed practices accordingly. At the same time though, there is more to the research process than either insider or outsider status. A simple binary rendition of the relationship between the researcher and the researched is not sufficient to explore its

complexities (Keval, 2009). Rather, the relationship can be characterised by fluidity and constant negotiations of actual and perceived identities.

Linking aspects of the research process such as data collection and data interpretation to a particular characteristic or even a combination of identity markers would be simplistic, particularly since identities are contingent, fluid, dynamic and flexible (Keval, 2009). Respectively, the borders of insider and outsider status are subject to negotiation and re-negotiation and by implication they are constantly shifting. For example, I see myself as both an insider and outsider, whilst oscillating between these positions as I move in and out of similarity and difference, both within and between individual and focus group interviews. The constant negotiation of researcher subjectivities in the present study shows that the insider and outsider positions must not be simplistically adhered to. Ultimately, a static and restrictive construction of the 'knower' status compared to 'stranger' status is not useful either empirically or analytically. Rather than locating these positions as exclusively positive or negative, it is important to examine these positions as possibilities for involvement in the setting and a chance to critically engage with different forms of identity.

As Young (2004) points out, such a binary system requires decisions to be made about precisely where the boundaries of certain groups lie and whether those on the margins of such groups fall inside or outside. Taking a similar position, Tinker and Armstrong (2008) observe that a key problem with notions of insiders and outsiders is that such a system mandates the classification of people into categories whilst at the same time forcing researchers to identify themselves as either insiders or outsiders of a series of groups. As a result, the insider/outsider classification promotes essentialist categorisations of certain groups whilst neglecting the significant differences within, as well as between, groups. Collectively, this framework fails to take into account the complexities of the multiple identities of researchers and of research participants which may preclude absolute religious, cultural and racial matching (Tinker and Armstrong, 2008). Researchers can differ from, or be similar to, research participants in various ways including religion (and the degree of practising religion), race and ethnicity, gender, age, socio-economic status or sexuality to name but some. A similarity in one of these

areas does not necessarily render the researcher an insider, just as a difference in one area does not necessarily make the researcher an outsider.

Garland *et al*. (2006) emphasise that if we wish to create knowledge that moves beyond essentialist discourses we must move beyond an essentialist view of the researcher, and recognise the complexity of subject positions that a researcher occupies and how these might influence the research process. Along similar lines, Tinker and Armstrong (2008) propose that researchers are always both insiders and outsiders in every research setting and thus it would be practically infeasible – and even if it were feasible it would not necessarily be desirable – to restrict researchers to interviewing only those who see them as insiders. Constraining researchers to interviewing people and groups with whom they perceive themselves as sharing key characteristics would also lead to minority researchers being extremely limited in the research that they can conduct. Ultimately, it is imperative that we break out of the boundaries of religious, racial and cultural parochialism, and acknowledge and respond to diversity in research.

4.9 Ethics

Another important issue to consider in relation to the methodology employed in this study is the issue of ethics. All the participants provided their consent to an interview, whilst it was made clear that both the confidentiality of their responses and the anonymity of their identities would be safeguarded throughout the research process[24]. In addition, the use of pseudonyms helped to protect participants' identity for reasons of safety and privacy. All interviewees were provided with an information sheet, which included the above information.[25]

As with any study researching a topic of a sensitive nature, some participants might have experienced psychological discomfort during the interview. In light of this, I was aware of participants' body language during the interview in order to identify how they responded in a physical sense to the questions asked. Hesitancy, a change in voice tone in terms of speed or volume, fiddling and avoiding eye contact may indicate emotional distress

[24] Refer to Appendix Four for a copy of the consent form.
[25] Refer to Appendix Five for a copy of the information sheet.

(Curtis and Curtis, 2011). At times, the body language of the interviewees indicated that they became uneasy about a specific line of questioning. For example, I realised that the question 'Could you describe to me the nature of the verbal abuse that you just mentioned?' or 'Can you give me some examples of the name-calling that you have been subjected to?' seemed to make some participants feel uneasy within individual interviews but, surprisingly, not in the context of focus group interviews.

In cases where body language suggested emotional distress, I decided to cut short that line of questioning to avoid adding further pressure on interviewees. Instead, I empathised with them by expressing my sympathy for what they have been through and asked them what they felt could be done to improve the situation. As Phillips and Bowling (2003) note, the research must not exploit the research participants. Part of conducting non-exploitative research involves minimising harm by supporting research participants through providing them with contact details for appropriate support organisations. Drawing on my experiences as a support worker at Victim Support, I offered advice to the interviewees on issues of contacting the police, practical ways to stay safe and available services of free and confidential emotional and practical support, such as Victim Support and the MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) project.

Moreover, in order to encourage interviewees to feel as comfortable as possible, I ensured that each interview was conducted at a location chosen by the interviewees themselves, and they were also assured that they could end the interview at any time. For example, individual interviews with women usually took place at the interviewees' home or at the Federation of Muslim Organisations in Leicester, whilst a few individual interviews took place at my office at the Department of Criminology, University of Leicester.[26] Focus group interviews took place at mosques, Islamic educational institutions and Islamic community centres in Leicester. It is possible that participants felt comfortable, secure and self-confident because they were interviewed in environments that they were mostly familiar with. This approach reinforced notions of good interview rapport and trusting relationships between the

[26] Individual interviews with stakeholders and policy-makers usually took place at the premises of their organisation or at my office at the University of Leicester.

researcher and the researched (Curtis and Curtis, 2011). However, in relation to some of the interviews which took place at the interviewees' home it is likely that certain individuals might have felt limited to speak freely because of the presence of other family members. For example, in all the Pakistani homes that I visited, I noticed that in-laws were almost always present in the house, if not in the same room where the interview was conducted. It is possible that these participants might not have been able to disclose the full details of their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation because other family members could overhear them.[27]

Furthermore, although recording (and then transcribing) the interviews is necessary for the detailed analysis required in qualitative research, the use of recording equipment might have disconcerted some participants who became alarmed at the prospect of their answers being preserved. When faced with refusal to record the interview, as was the case with a veiled Muslim woman who refused for the individual interview to be recorded, I offered to take notes, which was accepted by this participant. It is interesting to point out that some of the most valuable parts of the interview often took place as soon as I switched off my recording device. This raises the issue of post-interview remarks and interviewees' expectations that this material could be regarded as 'off the record'. In this case, I asked interviewees whether it would be possible to use this material in the study and everyone agreed to this.

Finally, I asked the participants about their feedback of the interview process and all of them stated that they found being able to talk about Islam, the veil and their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation worthwhile; to use their own words, they felt 'that someone actually cared'. This indicates that both interviews and focus group discussions contributed to participants' sense of confidence and enhanced their notions of being valued by listening to disclosures of abuse, harassment and violence. Accordingly, the majority of participants stated that they felt empowered to seek support and report future incidents of Islamophobic victimisation to the police.

[27] These participants explained that in the Pakistani culture, the bride (whether she is Muslim, Hindu or Christian) is expected to live with her husband's family. It is important to note that this is not Islamically required but it is understood as culturally 'necessary'.

4.10 Conclusion

Chapter Four has documented the methodology used in this study. It outlined the rationale in using individual and focus group interviews as the two primary sources of data collection. As noted above, individual, in-depth interviews allow for ‘rich’ data to be collected whilst focus group interviews can generate additional insights through group interactions. Equally, the chapter showed how the ethnographic phase allowed the research to take a brief glimpse into the lived realities of veiled Muslim women and was a valuable supplementary feature to these interviews. The chapter has also looked at the role of the researcher as an insider or outsider. In the context of the present study it was argued that being an outsider can benefit the research process by enabling the researcher to ask the kinds of interview questions which would otherwise be ‘off-limits’, to minimise participants’ fear of being judged and to maintain a critical distance from the interview data.

Chapter Five
Constructions of the Veil

5.1 Introduction

In the context of violence and Islamophobia in the post 9/11 and 7/7 era, the wearing of the veil is a highly visible manifestation of being a Muslim in the public sphere. Accordingly, it is perceived as the most potent symbol of Islam in the West. At the same time, the veil is routinely seen as a demonstration of gender oppression and *prima facie* evidence of Muslim backwardness in the West. Based on the rigid dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' the act of veiling is constructed as evidence of the misogyny and violence associated with Islam whilst the act of unveiling is identified as an example of the equation of the West with gender equality and freedom. From this standpoint, the image of the 'veiled Muslim body' erases the multiple identities of Muslim women as subjects and reduces them to passive victims of gender subjugation in Islam. Indeed, we saw in Chapter Three how the erasing nature of this prevailing stereotype marks veiled Muslim women as 'ideal' victims of Islamophobia. In this sense, popular perceptions of veiled Muslim women as submissive, oppressed and subjugated render them 'soft' and 'easy' targets to attack thereby increasing their vulnerability in public places.

Against this background, I explore agency within women's talk about the veil; in particular, how they construct themselves as agents of wearing the veil in a non-Muslim country such as the UK. Drawing on individual and focus group interviews conducted with veiled Muslim women in Leicester, I focus on their reasons for taking up the veil and examine what the veil means to them. Given the scarce amount of primary data available surrounding the veil, this chapter seeks to develop a better understanding of women's reasons for wearing it. Recognising the multiple and overlapping meanings of the veil for its wearers is essential to understanding the nature and impact of Islamophobic victimisation upon them. In other words, uncovering the interpretations of the veil from the perspective of veiled Muslim women themselves is an important step in understanding the true effects of, and responses to, this victimisation.

Respectively, the chapter offers new insights into the definitions and significance of the veil, and the agency of veiled Muslim women. It argues that the veil contains a two-fold dimension: a religious dimension and a gender-related one. The chapter begins with an examination of the veil as an act of worship, religious submission and public modesty before moving on to consider the veil as a form of protection, empowerment and identity. The chapter demonstrates how the veil can be transformed from a symbol of gender oppression and a badge of backwardness to a symbol of Muslim identity. Importantly, the chapter documents the metamorphosis of the veil from a passive piece of cloth to an interactive tool that Muslim women use to practise their faith and gender, and this sets the context for subsequent chapters which go on to assess the impact of, and responses to, the targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women in public places.

5.2 Reasons for wearing the veil

5.2.1 Act of worship

When asked why they wear the veil, participants provided answers with at least two important dimensions: religious and gender-related. Drawing on religious reasons, participants stated that *Allah* had asked them to wear the veil and thus they wanted to please Him by covering in public and in the presence of non-*mahram* (marriageable) men. The principle of avoiding contact with 'non-*mahram*' men is pivotal for women in Islam (Hannan, 2011). According to the *Quran* (the word of *Allah* given to Prophet Muhammad by Angel Gabriel), the *Sunnah* (the way of life of Prophet Muhammad) and the *Hadith* (second-hand reports of Prophet Muhammad's lifestyle), 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*[28] in her presence. Participants explained that these three sources are indispensable; one cannot practise 'true' Islam without consulting all of them. As such, their decision to wear the veil came out of a belief that it was a religious commandment and to this extent, they wanted to express their

[28] A '*mahram*' is a man whom a woman cannot marry in her life such as her father, brother, father-in-law or son. As such, a Muslim woman must be veiled in the presence of men who do not have with her a degree of consanguinity (blood relationship) that precludes marriage.

commitment to the Muslim faith. This line of argument affirms the role of the veil as an expression of religious observance and piety. The following comments illustrate the participants' desire to please *Allah*.

> *For me, the veil is very much about expressing my love of my God. It is a way of coming closer to Allah. It's like me saying 'Look, I'm doing this to show you how much I love you and what my faith means to me'.*
>
> Layla, 38 years old

> *For me the veil is obedience to my Lord. I wear it because Allah told me that 'This is what you have to do'.*
>
> Rahimah, 44 years old

> *The niqab is one more step towards pleasing Allah. I express the love I have for my Lord with my veil.*
>
> Zubaidah, 20 years old

Throughout individual and focus group interviews it became evident that their decision to wear the veil was based upon what participants believed *Allah* had asked them to do. From this perspective, the wearing of the veil demonstrates participants' conformity and devotion to God's commandments, and makes a public statement of religious submission to Islam (Bullock, 2011; Hannan, 2011). Moreover, it indicates agency on the part of the woman who acts upon her understanding of the Islamic scripts. Such understandings of the dress requirement for a woman in Islam derived from reading the *Quran*, although it was not necessarily through *Quranic* directives that such meaning had been constructed. For example, some participants argued that their understanding of the dress requirements in Islam was inspired by the wives of the Prophet, who were fully covered. Similar to the ideal of the Virgin Mary in Christianity, the wives of Prophet Muhammad are perceived as role models for women in Islam (Hasan, 2011).[29] Other

[29] Under this idea, if the Prophet's wives covered their faces so too should all women in Islam (Hasan, 2011).

participants revealed that it was through an increased religiosity and spiritual awareness before or after a trip for *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) or *Umra* (the lesser pilgrimage) that they decided to practise Islam by wearing the veil.

Moreover, I asked participants whether they wore the *hijab* and *jilbab* prior to wearing the *niqab*. Some participants revealed that they did not wear any type of veiling prior to wearing the *niqab* but when they started to learn more about their religion, they realised that it was either recommended or obligatory (depending upon their understanding of the Islamic scripts) to wear the veil. In this case, they either 'went straight in' or took gradual steps into veiling including wearing the *hijab* first, then adding the *jilbab* and then wearing the *niqab*. For converts, deciding to wear the *niqab* (or any type of veiling prior to taking up the *niqab*) was a choice based on converting to Islam and wishing to demonstrate their Muslim identity in public.

On the one hand, some participants argued that the covering of the face was not obligatory but a 'recommended' part of the *Sunnah*[30] of Prophet Muhammad. Whilst acknowledging that the wearing of the veil was not compulsory, these participants decided to take this one step further by adopting the *niqab* – in addition to wearing the *hijab* (headscarf) and *jilbab* (long robe) – as an expression of extreme piety. On the other hand, some participants (mostly in the context of focus group discussions at mosques) considered the covering of the face with the *niqab* as religiously mandated according to their understanding of the *Quran* and as such, it would be a sin if they did not wear it. The latter argument indicates that some participants might have felt religiously obligated to wear the veil premised on the notion that it was a *Quranic* prescription.

Regardless of whether veiling was perceived as obligatory or not, the consensus view was that veiled Muslim women would be 'rewarded' in the afterlife because of demonstrating their commitment to *Allah* by wearing the veil despite adversities – namely, suffering Islamophobic abuse, violence and intimidation – in the present life. Afshar *et al*. (2005) state that women who define themselves as Muslim have a clear appreciation of both the rewards

[30] As mentioned earlier, *Sunnah* refers to the way of life of Prophet Muhammad. It often stands as synonymous with *Hadith*, which is the collection of statements and actions of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.

and the duties that Islam imposes on believers in their everyday lives. Correspondingly, the veiled Muslim women who took part in this study felt that they had secured their place in *jannah* (paradise) because of taking up the veil as an extreme form of piety. This issue will be revisited in subsequent chapters since this notion of 'rewards' in the afterlife emerges as a common coping mechanism for dealing with incidents of Islamophobic victimisation. As the following extracts illustrate, the rewards in afterlife have crystallised participants' decision to wear the veil. For example, Aleena referred to the rewards that veiled Muslim women will receive in paradise including the privilege of meeting the Creator.

> *In our religion we believe there is life after death and everybody is working their way towards heaven and they are doing good deeds to get closer to God. Everyone has their own way of attaining paradise and I express that with my veil.*
>
> Halimah, 19 years old

> *Allah will come to see us. If you don't cover you will go and see Allah. Please Allah more and He will be the one to come to you.*
>
> Aleena, 28 years old

5.2.2 Public modesty

In addition to religious reasons, participants drew on gender-related arguments to explain their decision to cover, particularly the notion of the veil as a sign of public modesty. During the course of interviews and focus group discussions participants stated that modesty is one of the main reasons why *Allah* requires women to cover. Contractor (2011) observes that the covering of the face is an integral and obligatory aspect of the modesty guidelines for women in Islam. Gabriel (2011) suggests that the purpose of veiling is to discourage adultery and promiscuity, and confine sexual relations within the boundaries of matrimony, thus avoiding the person's descent into sin and *fitna* (chaos). In this regard, the aim is to prevent immodest thoughts from entering one's mind when seeing a person of the opposite sex (Gabriel, 2011). From this perspective, the face is perceived as the source of beauty

and looking at it can lead to *zina* (fornication); however, *zina* can be prevented (Aluffi, 2013). Participants felt that the wearing of the veil helped them to avoid the contingency of lustful thoughts or liaisons and even of *zina* in Islam. In this context, participants described women as 'pearls' or 'jewels' that must be covered in order to be protected.

> *If you had a priceless jewel would you walk down the street with it in your hand or would you cover it up and put it in a safe? Islam sees women as priceless jewels to be covered and kept safe.*
>
> *There is a difference between wearing the veil and not wearing it. Women in Islam are like a precious jewel, like a diamond, and when you are covered you have that value but if you are not covered then what value do you have?*
>
> Focus group participants

Clearly, the purpose of wearing the veil is to render Muslim women 'invisible' to male attention and accordingly, to keep them safe from lustful thoughts and liaisons. As such, the wearing of the veil enables Muslim women to leave the house without any concerns that they are going against the tenets of Islam in terms of gender relations and sex segregation. In light of these points, it is reasonable to suggest that the veil serves as a symbolic representation of Muslim women's position in society in relation to modesty, chastity and public decency. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the veil lies outside the sphere of commercialised, mass-consumption fashion and promiscuous clothing. Hasan (2011) argues that there is a tendency amongst women in the West to wear less clothing and display more skin, reveal curves and cleavages through tightness of clothing. Moreover, there is pressure upon women in the West to be promiscuous, to be slim, to uncover and to follow the latest fashions (Hasan, 2011). Indeed, participants highlighted that the imposition of Western dress codes – including social pressure placed on women to conform to the unrealistic body images promoted in the media – contributed to their decision to wear the veil as a form of 'resistance' to this pressure. As the following extracts demonstrate,

Fariza and Rasheeda felt that they escaped the pressures of competitive consumerism and obsessive bodily preoccupation by wearing the veil in public.

> *Wearing the veil is a big relief. Before when I used to wear the hijab I didn't want to go out unless I looked absolutely beautiful so putting the niqab on saves me a lot of time. It saves me from wasting a lot of my important time because once I put it on I know I'm protected. When you go out you have to look a certain way, you have to act in a certain way but when you've got the veil on it strips you from all these qualities that you had before.*
>
> Fariza, 29 years old

> *I just love it. I hate having to choose what to wear. When I go out I just throw an abaya [long robe] on whatever I'm wearing in the house and I look presentable and I put on my hijab and my niqab and underneath I could be wearing my pyjamas [laughing].*
>
> Rasheeda, 41 years old

An important point to recognise is that participants found the wearing of the veil 'empowering' in the sense that it allowed them to leave the house without worrying about being judged based on their looks. Hannan (2011) observes that the veil encourages women in Islam to participate in the public sphere on the basis that it provides them with confidence and emancipation. Following this line of reasoning, it could be argued that rather than isolating them from society, the veil allows Muslim women to engage actively in it, without the risk of being exploited on the basis of their physical appearance or gender. This ties in with the suggestions of Bullock (2011) who found that the veil desexualises women in the public space and liberates them from being 'slaves' to Western cultural beauty ideals. Indeed, my participants stated that the veil enabled them to participate in society without being judged on their physical appearance. As such, the wearing of the veil took the pressure off them to abide by Western fashion standards and expectations of how women should dress in public. In line with this, the veil allowed them to assert agency

by taking control of their appearance. This is illustrated by the following comments in a focus group discussion at an Islamic centre.

> *Participant A: We live in a society where especially as a woman people judge you by what you look like. Even in the Asian community, it's all about how pretty you are or how slim you are and I don't want to be part of that.*
>
> *Participant B: When I put the niqab on I feel a lot more confident because people don't know how I look like so they can't judge me because a lot of it is judgement. Unfortunately, this is how society is like. People will judge you for what you look like. The niqab removes people's judgment because they can't see how we look like.*
>
> *Participant C: I think the face is the first thing someone will see and your face will say a lot about you. Once you've got it covered, people won't judge you by your face appearance.*
>
> Focus group participants

Furthermore, Hasan (2011) points out that adultery, pornography, provocative fashions and the increasing sexualisation of young girls in Western society are just a few examples of deteriorating standards of public decency in the West. As a means of public modesty, the veil protects Muslim women from such harms and functions as a 'visible' rejection of the sexual promiscuity of the West. From this standpoint, the veil serves as a symbol of opposition to the Western lifestyle on the basis that it infers anti-moral decadence. It is noteworthy that the wearing of the veil helped participants to keep themselves safe from the contamination of 'Western ways' related to immorality and corruption. As the following extracts show, Rafia defended veiling as a form of extreme modesty in the same way that Western women choose to be immodest whilst Zainab felt that public modesty is rejected in British society. Echoing similar views, participants in focus group interviews stated that Islam liberated them from the 'evils' of the West. Such views are

problematic on the basis that they demonise the West, Western women and homosexual people and contribute to the rise of Westphobia as a form of prejudice and bigotry. The following quotes demonstrate the range of misunderstandings between cultures and highlight that communication between 'us' and 'them' is a core issue to tackling bigotry.

> *Although I'm not the most modest niqabi because I don't wear gloves, I stand to defend the outer limits of modesty. There are Western women who are on the outer limits of immodesty, who walk around with loads of bare flesh. They wear the least they possibly can and that's one extreme which is quite permitted and veiling is an extreme form of modesty and I'm standing for it.*
>
> Rafia, 45 years old

> *British people have been modest in the old days but they have now given it up. They look down upon us but if they prefer seeing on billboards naked women exposing themselves, selling themselves for a few quid, what does this say for their morals? Even homosexuality is accepted nowadays but modesty is not accepted in British society.*
>
> Zainab, 50 years old

> *Islam is a religion which is visible, men are told to keep a beard and women are told to cover up. It is a religion which is in your face, you can't hide it away. The industry of evil [West] is built on two things: immodesty which is the opposite of Islam and the second is extravagance and Islam teaches simplicity. Islam is in direct conflict with today's values. Islam doesn't have any time for things like pornography, nudity and shamelessness.*
>
> Focus group participant

5.2.3 Protection from male attention

The notion of public modesty also serves as a means of protection from the male sexual gaze. During the course of interviews and focus group discussions, it became apparent how social context guided participants' decision with respect to choosing to wear the veil in a non-Muslim country such as the UK. Participants reported that the wearing of the veil became necessary in the British context because of the sexual exploitation of women through staring in the public sphere. Participants felt 'safe' on the basis that the veil served as a safeguard from being treated as sexual objects. This ties in with the suggestions of Hannan (2011) who argues that in Islam women should be protected from the masculine gaze. From this perspective, the veil empowers women to enter the public domain instead of feeling powerless in the face of sexual harassment in public. This is exemplified in the experiences of Ruqiia, a Somali college student, who described how the veil protected her against boys' persistent staring.

> *Before putting it on boys always had the habit of staring at my face. I didn't like being stared at. I hated being stared at. It creeps the hell out of me. So this protects me now.*
>
> Ruqiia, 17 years old

Similarly, Nisha and Nabeeha felt protected against men's aggressive flirting on the basis that they were fully covered. Moreover, these participants argued that according to the *Quran* and the *Sunnah*, Muslim women should not leave the house unless it is considered absolutely necessary. Under this idea, the veil was seen as a means of maintaining the female body as a space of 'sacred privacy' in line with religious prescriptions (El Guindi, 1999). As such, wearing the veil allowed them to enter the public sphere without worrying that they compromised their privacy and dignity as Muslim women.

The veil means protection from dirty looks. Some people are under the assumption that we wear it because we're ugly but that is not true. We're just trying to protect our beauty. I'm married now so I don't want other men looking at me. Women who continue to beautify themselves and trying to look gorgeous, they do it for other people, not their husbands but if you are married you shouldn't do that. That's why adultery happens and families split up. I am the only person in my family that wears the niqab. My sisters don't wear it. I've got three sisters. They always attract men's attention but I think that's dangerous because if you have a family and you fall in love with another man, then your marriage is void.

Nisha, 28 years old

The niqab is privacy, when you walk out of the door and people see your face they can read lots of personal things about you. They can tell how beautiful you are, they can tell how old you are, they can tell personal things from your face and if you want to be private from other people and you don't want them to be thinking these things, especially men, you know, they all think 'Would I do her?' If they can see your face they will think that but if they can't see you face they won't.

Nabeeha, 22 years old

In hindsight, the individual reasons of women who choose to take up the veil cannot be fully explained without also giving weight to details of personal biographic experience and the particularities of living in a Muslim-dominated community in the UK. To my surprise, many participants reported that the veil guarded them from the gaze of Muslim men whereas I had assumed that the veil served as a means of protection from non-Muslim men. As the following extracts illustrate, for both Shelina and Zafirah the veil functioned as a shield against the male gaze within Highfields and the areas around East Park Road and Spinney Hill, which are areas in Leicester with a large population of Muslims. Shelina and Zafirah explained that prior to wearing the *niqab*,

they used to wear the *hijab* and the *jilbab* but they felt uncomfortable walking in these areas because Muslim men would persistently stare at them. As such, wearing the veil enabled them to walk freely in a Muslim-dominated community such as Highfields without worrying about Muslim men staring at them in a lustful manner. From this perspective, the veil allowed participants to 'assimilate' within their local Muslim community. Equally importantly, they felt that they gained respect from Muslim men in the local community because they were fully veiled.

> *I felt I needed to wear it because I didn't get the respect from men, particularly in Highfields, they used to stare at me. I felt dirty and the veil gave me that protection.*
>
> Shelina, 36 years old

> *When I wear the veil and I walk in a predominantly Muslim community I feel shielded because it takes away the glances that I don't want. The veil makes a statement but I'm talking about making a statement not to non-Muslims but to Muslims and predominantly to Muslim men; that I don't wish to be seen in that manner. I did notice that when I didn't wear it I did attract a lot of male attention within the Muslim community. Especially if you're walking past a masjid [mosque] and it's all men standing outside the masjid you don't want everybody looking at you. So I thought it's probably a good thing to veil*.
>
> Zafirah, 33 years old

These comments offer new insights into the significance of veiling in Muslim-dominated areas in contemporary Britain. In this context, the veil provides an immediate solution and the means of entering the public sphere in a Muslim-dominated community in the UK. Drawing on my own experiences while conducting interviews and focus group discussions in Highfields, I did find it difficult to cope with the persistent staring of men from the local Muslim community. Similar to Zafirah's experiences, the most intimidating experience for me was walking past a mosque when men would gather or leave the

premises for the purposes of prayers; in this case, I would face large groups of men waiting outside the mosque often staring when an unveiled woman was passing by. However, while conducting the ethnographic strand of the study (whereby I was fully veiled) I did feel protected from Muslim men's persistent staring in the context of Highfields but I did not feel safe from verbal abuse and intimidating behaviour in the city centre of Leicester, as the next chapter reveals.

Along similar lines, Jamilah, a white English convert, decided to wear the veil in order to protect herself from Muslim men's lewd behaviour. As a new Muslim, Jamilah decided to transform her appearance by wearing the *hijab* in harmony with the Islamic teachings and she generally reoriented her lifestyle towards Islam by giving up alcohol and smoking. However, whilst wearing the *hijab* in Newham, a predominantly Pakistani area in London, Jamilah felt that Pakistani men from the local community saw her as 'fair game' because she had converted to Islam. This notion of unwanted male attention had led her to decide to cover her face with the veil.

> *I used to dress in little skirts, shoulders out, arms out, hair out, my hair was probably as blonde as yours, I used to dye my hair, I used to love all of that and I didn't see it as a problem but looking back now I realise that I did get a lot of male attention. I had men chasing me, I had married men whom I worked with, they would come out with very sexual remarks, so I know now that this is what Islam means when it says this lifestyle wrong. So I understood it and I thought 'OK, let me cover up'. Once I put the hijab on men were thinking, especially the Pakistani community, 'Oh look! She's a Muslim now so we want her even more' so they became even more attracted to me because I converted to Islam so I thought 'Right, I'm going to start covering my face too' and I did.*
>
> Jamilah, 28 years old

During the interview Jamilah also highlighted the issue of choice; she decided to wear the veil in order to guard her privacy. Indeed, throughout interviews and focus group discussions the consensus view was that the wearing of the veil was an act of choice. Comments such as 'I wasn't forced to wear it' and 'It was my choice' were routinely made by participants. As an act of choice, the veil liberated participants through facilitating their presence and physical mobility in the public space. Within this context, it is important to recognise that this sense of 'liberation' is associated with the notion of anonymity that the veil provides its wearers. Rather than isolating participants, the veil strengthened them both spiritually and pragmatically by empowering them to leave the domestic sphere and enter the public space on the basis that they were anonymous. The issue of anonymity as a form as liberation is illustrated in the following comments.

> *When I am fully covered I feel liberated. I feel I can be whoever I want to be. Nobody knows who I am. I can walk freely without anybody judging me by what I look like or the shape of my body.*
>
> Aliyah, 18 years old

> *With the veil I can remain anonymous and that's how Islam deals with the woman. This is why we cover, to stay anonymous so that people don't know who we are. My beauty is for my husband alone.*
>
> Nazia, 50 years old

> *When I wasn't veiled I was very much like 'Oh dear, how am I going to leave the house?' but now nobody knows who I am so I feel confident. For me this is the key about the veil.*
>
> Nimah, 28 years old

Closely linked to the agency of the veil as an act of choice is the significance of its visibility in public. On the one hand, the veil is associated with notions of 'invisibility' on the basis that it marks the presence of Muslim women in public as anonymous. On the other hand, the wearing of the veil increases the woman's visibility because it shows her Muslim identity, particularly in a non-Muslim country. This aspect of visible 'Muslimness' had considerable importance for many participants who drew my attention to the verse in the *Quran* which reads: 'Oh Prophet, tell your wives and daughters, and believing women, to draw their cloaks around them so that they may be recognised and not harmed' (33:59). The following paragraphs demonstrate that as a visible manifestation of being a Muslim, the wearing of the veil means identity and a badge of allegiance of Islam and Muslims.

5.3 Muslim identity

As discussed above, constructions of the veil include a sense of religious piety and observance to the *Quranic* prescriptions, public modesty, rejection of consumerist values, protection from the male gaze and a sense of liberation based on the anonymity that the veil provides its wearers. Within this framework, participants explicitly stated that they chose to affirm their Muslim identity by wearing the veil in public because they were proud to be Muslim. Throughout interviews and focus group discussions participants emphasised that showing their Muslim identity was a key purpose of wearing the veil with the view to be recognised as Muslims. As such, veiling served the purpose of identifying participants as followers of Islam in public. This ties in with the suggestions of Contractor (2011) who found that veiled Muslim women are intentionally recognisable as Muslims whereby the veil is an affirmation of their faith, particularly in the West. From this perspective, the veil serves as a means of identification of Muslim women which is in line with the *Quranic* injunction 'So that they may be recognised as believing women (33:59)'. As the following comments illustrate, participants saw the veil as a form of statement which marked their Muslim identity in a non-Muslim country.

I decided to wear the veil because I wanted to be identified as a Muslim.

Aisha, 34 years old

When people see me they know straight away I'm a Muslim. The message I send is that I'm a Muslim because I'm fully covered.

Jahidah, 22 years old

Before I didn't look Muslim 100% because I wasn't wearing it. If I were to remove the veil when I go outside, nobody knows who I am or what I am.

Shantaz, 38 years old

Interestingly, participants interpreted the veil as part of their identity, both individually and collectively. For example, on an individual level Faridah and Shafia saw the veil as part of their private body whilst on a collective level, Wadiah highlighted the notion of belonging to the *ummah*, the geographically unbounded community of Muslim believers.

If I go out without the veil I feel as if I'm naked. The veil is now part of my private body.

Faridah, 36 years old

For me the niqab is mine. I don't know how to explain it in English but it's like here you are in my house and my house is my house. I do what I want in my house so the niqab is mine. It belongs to me. It is part of my body. It is part of who I am.

Shafia, 31 years old[31]

[31] Shafia is a French national of Algerian heritage. At the time of conducting the interviews, Shafia and her family had recently moved to Leicester from Paris because of the veil ban in France which prevented her from practising her religion in public.

I like it to be recognised as a Muslim woman and feel part of the ummah.

Wadiah, 40 years old

From this perspective, the wearing of the veil gives meaning and significance to the person's individual and collective identity in Islam. As an act of solidarity with the *ummah*, the veil renders Muslim women symbolic of their faith. Seen in this light, the veil is a badge which categorises them as Muslims and allows them to feel members of a dynamic, unbounded world community, which is conceptualised as crossing ethnic, racial, geographical and political boundaries (Afshar *et al*., 2005). This is particularly the case in non-Muslim countries where Muslim women (and men) might feel the need to reinforce their religious identity with scripturally ordained apparel (Gabriel, 2011). In Islam, both Muslim women and men are expected to be distinct from non-Muslims in dress, and the wearing of the veil allows women to achieve this distinction (Gabriel, 2011).[32] In this regard, the veil explicitly labels the individual as Muslim, making veiled Muslim women representative of the Muslim faith.

As already mentioned, some participants stated that it is an obligatory religious duty to wear the veil whilst others argued that the covering of the face is optional. Accordingly, some participants identified themselves as 'practising Muslims' and set the parameters of religious piety: 'good' Muslim versus 'bad' Muslim. This ties in with the suggestions of Hannan (2011) who argues that the wearing of the veil is often seen as a prerequisite to being a 'good practising Muslim'. For Wadud (2007: 219), practising Islam – including veiling, praying five times a day, reading the *Quran* and fasting during *Ramadan*[33] – is the 'sixth pillar of Islam'. The wearing of the veil as an example of being a 'good' Muslim is illustrated in the following comments in the context of focus group interviews.

[32] In this study all participants wore full-length *jilbabs* accompanied with *hijabs* and *niqabs*, mostly in black. Hasan (2011) points out that a reason why the customary public dress in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states is restricted to a black veil for women and a white robe for men is to avoid individualism in dress.

[33] *Ramadan* is the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which strict fasting is observed from sunrise to sunset.

There is a difference between the practising Muslim and somebody who just calls themselves Muslim. I can call myself a practising Muslim but before [started wearing the veil two years ago] I was just a Muslim by name. I didn't go along with my responsibilities and duties as a Muslim but now I do wear it.

Before, when I was at University, you couldn't really tell I was a Muslim because I didn't practise my religion. I never really wore anything Islamic. Now I feel I'm a good Muslim because I'm more practising.

The veil is part of being a Muslim and I consider myself to be a good Muslim.

People call themselves Christians but a lot of them don't practise Christianity the way they should. The closest religion to Islam is Christianity but they have diverted from their religion so far that you wouldn't identify them as Christians. We don't want to be like them. We want to be known as Muslims. That's why we veil but they don't like that. In the Quran it says 'They are not going to be happy until Muslims are like them' but we don't want to be like them.

Focus group participants

5.4 Conclusion

Existing debates routinely treat the veil as a homogeneous practice thus failing to contextualise the multiple and overlapping understandings that it holds for individuals who choose to wear it. This chapter challenged the symbolism of the veil as a sign of gender oppression and revealed the more nuanced meanings that it holds for veil wearers. Although this thesis focuses on the targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women in public, it was necessary to identify possible interpretations of the veil because this discussion provides the backdrop for the topics that follow in subsequent

chapters regarding the nature and impact of, as well as victims' responses to, this victimisation.

It became evident that the veil contains a two-fold dimension: a religious dimension and a gender-related one. From a religious perspective, participants understood the veil as a symbol of worship, religious commitment and piety. It was seen as something that *Allah* has asked them to do. Part of the rationale for covering was based upon the issue of public modesty in Islam in order to prevent *fitna*. From a gender perspective, being fully veiled provided participants with a sense of protection. It gained them respect from Muslim men whilst the anonymity conferred less of a chance of undesirable male attention when in public.

Seen in this context, the veil evolves from a passive piece of cloth to a religious standpoint and an identity position. Indeed, both the individual and focus group interviews with veiled Muslim women showed that the wearing of the veil points to two components of identity: religion and gender. As such, the veil is not a passive piece of garment but has religious and gender-based significance for its wearers. Ultimately, the veil emerges as an important and integral part of women's identity. Respectively, it is likely that an Islamophobic attack upon a veiled Muslim woman represents a devastating attack upon her identity as a Muslim and as a woman. The next chapter 'Uncovering Islamophobic victimisation' provides a window into the everyday experiences of veiled Muslim women in public and examines the nature and impact of manifestations of Islamophobia upon victims, their families and wider communities.

Chapter Six
Uncovering Islamophobic Victimisation

6.1 Introduction

The wearing of the veil is the most visible manifestation of being a Muslim in the public sphere. However, the veil is interpreted differently by those who wear it and those – Muslims and non-Muslims – who do not. Rather, these readings of the veil are diametrically opposed. As discussed in Chapter Five, the multiple and overlapping meanings of the veil include a sense of religious piety, public modesty, protection from the objectifying male gaze, liberation from the oppressive beauty culture of the West, and a sense of empowerment based on the anonymity that the veil provides its wearers. However, in the eyes of their abusers the veil is neither a valued nor an acceptable form of expression of religious identity in the UK (as elsewhere in the West). Rather, the veil stands metonymically for radical Islam by virtue of its symbolism as a sign of gender inequality, Islamist terrorism and self-segregation.

Against this background, veiled Muslim women face an increased risk of abuse and hostility on the basis of the visibility of their Muslim identity, particularly in a post-9/11 climate. In light of popular perceptions of gender oppression in Islam, veiled Muslim women are seen as passive, powerless and timid which marks them as an 'easy' target to attack. This chapter examines the nature of Islamophobic victimisation and sheds light on the different forms of abuse that veiled Muslim women experience in public. The chapter reveals the regularity with which veiled Muslim women become targets of verbal and physical attacks. It also uncovers 'invisible' forms of Islamophobic victimisation including persistent staring which are rarely recognised or acknowledged as such by victims. Although it is difficult to quantify this victimisation[34], the chapter identifies how commonplace these experiences are and highlights the relevance of factors such as space and type of veil in terms of rendering Muslim women more or less vulnerable. The

[34] With respect to focus group interviews, it is difficult to quantify women's experiences because in some cases I was not allowed to take notes regarding participants' details by the relevant gatekeepers in order to ensure their anonymity.

nature and frequency of this victimisation is relevant to understanding its impact upon victims, their families and wider Muslim communities. Through its consideration of such issues as these, the chapter documents the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia, and this sets the context for subsequent chapters which go on to assess their coping mechanisms and criminal justice responses to this victimisation.

6.2 Nature of Islamophobic victimisation

6.2.1 Verbal abuse

Throughout interviews and focus group discussions participants were familiar with the term 'Islamophobia' and had a relatively good understanding of what the term meant in its simplest form – hostility towards Islam and Muslims. A couple of participants had not heard of the term before but it became apparent that they had nonetheless experienced incidents that could be described as manifestations of Islamophobia. Regardless of their level of understanding of the term, participants related many incidents that they had personally experienced to this victimisation. They reported that some of this hostility was manifested in terms of physical violence although most was in the form of verbal abuse. In particular, verbal abuse from strangers in public including streets, parks, shopping centres and public transport was a clear feature of their everyday life.[35] This is consistent with the views of Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) who found that manifestations of Islamophobia are invariably random in nature on the basis that 'visible' Muslim women are randomly targeted when they are seen in public.

Within the present study, respondents described walking on the street and being unexpectedly verbally or physically attacked. Every single one of the participants stated that they had suffered verbal abuse including name-calling, swearing, threats of physical violence and verbal abuse disguised as jokes. Underlying all these forms of verbal abuse was a clear sense of anti-Muslim sentiments and this was made apparent through the language used by the perpetrators. There was a strong feeling amongst participants that an

[35] Additionally, a couple of participants reported that they had been verbally abused on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace as well as blogs and chat rooms (for a discussion of online Islamophobic hate crime see Awan, 2013; Copsey, Dack, Littler and Feldman, 2013).

anti-Muslim component was indeed part of this abuse. Correspondingly, the use of anti-Muslim language was the most common reason given by participants for believing that these incidents were motivated by Islamophobia. For example, when explaining the basis for their perception that the incidents were Islamophobic, participants pointed out that the perpetrators had actually referred to Islam or the veil. The second most common reason for believing that these incidents were motivated by Islamophobia was participants' belief that these attacks would not have happened to them if they did not wear the veil.

Having reviewed the available literature on this topic, I realised that there was no evidence of the type of verbal abuse that veiled Muslim women encounter in public and therefore I asked participants to offer some specific examples. The findings described below tell us more about the perpetrators rather than victims themselves. Throughout interviews and focus group discussions participants made explicit reference to the type of language used by the perpetrators which signified their motivations for the attack. For example, most participants had been called names such as 'Terrorists', 'Muslim bombers' and 'Suicide bombers', which indicate the perpetrators' perceptions of veiled Muslim women as a security or terrorist 'threat'. Seen in this light, the veiled female body offers a visual representation of radical Islam, at least in the eyes of the perpetrators. Along similar lines, the following comments demonstrate that the wearing of the veil was perceived as a camouflage for a terrorist.

Have you got a bomb under there?

Nisha, 28 years old

Are you carrying belts full of explosives?

Jahidah, 22 years old

When are you going to blow us up?

Shelina, 36 years old

Why are you dressed like that? Are you a suicide bomber?

Amtullah, 24 years old

Importantly, participants argued that even if they were not seen to be involved in a terrorist plot – because veiled Muslim women are supposedly too oppressed, uneducated and incapable of autonomy – they were nevertheless perceived as the mothers of future home-grown terrorists; hence perpetrators often called them names such as 'Bin Laden's wife'. Research highlights that 'visible' Muslims and veiled Muslim women in particular are often targeted because their abusers hold the view that all Muslims are terrorists or terrorist sympathisers (Ameli, Elahi and Merali, 2004; Sheridan and Gillett, 2005; Khan, 2007; Choudhury, 2010; Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010). Additionally, participants described examples of verbal abuse which illustrated the racist and xenophobic sentiments of the perpetrators such as:

Go back to your country, you don't belong here!

Nadia, 29 years old

Go back to where from you came from! Go back to Afghanistan!

Focus group participant

If you want Sharia go back to Iraq!

Nabeeha, 22 years old

Take it off! You are in my country now!

Layla, 38 years old

In the eyes of their abusers, veiled Muslim women are seen as immigrants who 'don't belong' despite the fact that they have been born or largely raised in the UK. Within this paradigm, the wearing of the veil marks an unwelcome religious, cultural and racial presence (Grillo and Shah, 2012). Crucially, this type of language can be linked to the alleged 'Islamification' of the UK. In the current climate of economic instability, Muslims are supposedly 'taking over'

Britain and as a result the visibility of the veil poses a 'threat' to national identity. This discourse mirrors certain European government policies that are designed to 'domesticate' Islam. For example, the banning of the *hijab* in schools in France in 2004, the banning of Minarets in Switzerland in 2009 and more recently the banning of the *niqab* in public in European countries such as France, Belgium and Italy, are clear examples of assimilation policies which aim to eradicate the visibility of Islam in the West. Even in countries such as the UK where there is no formal (national) ban on either *hijabs* or *niqabs*, the wearing of the veil is routinely seen as an unwillingness (whether intentionally or unintentionally) to integrate into British society. Certainly, in this thinking integration means assimilation. Interestingly, this issue was debated in a focus group interview at an Islamic centre.

> *Participant A: If they get rid of Muslims then they will have a white Christian England.*
>
> *Participant B: I don't think it is about being Christian. I think it's about being like them. Hindu and Sikhs are brown. They are Asians but they drink, they go clubbing, women wear short skirts. They'll do everything like them. It's about socialising so they feel more integrated with them. They feel they are the same.*
>
> *Participant C: You're right, especially the drinking thing kind of unites them. They think 'We might be different colours but we are the same, we drink, we club, we dress the same, we are mixing' but we as Muslims don't do what they do. We dress differently. We say no to drinking. We won't go clubbing. Yeah there are Muslims that do go but generally you won't see that many Muslims going to clubs. Even if they go, you can't tell that they are Muslim. Even we as Muslims can't recognise them. If someone is not dressed as a Muslim you can't tell if they are Muslim or not.*
>
> Focus group participants

Moreover, there were incidents where the nature of the verbal abuse suggested both racist and Islamophobic hatred. For example, some black Muslim women who took part in this study revealed that they had bananas thrown at them whilst others heard monkey noises or comments such as 'Go home Muslim monkey' or 'Black terrorist' being made when they were walking on the street. As Sallah (2010) points out, bananas and monkey noises are known symbols of racism. At one level, this indicates that the targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women can be attributed to Islamophobic attitudes as well as to racist and xenophobic sentiments by virtue of the fact that these elements are often inextricably intertwined. In this regard Islamophobia, racism and xenophobia become mutually reinforcing phenomena, and hostility against veiled Muslim women should also be considered in the context of a more general climate of hostility towards 'otherness'. However, this is not to overlook the fact that veiled Muslim women have been victims of targeted violence because their abusers have been motivated either solely or partially by other factors. For example, the sight of the veiled female body might provoke anger in some men who are used to 'seeing' in the public space.

> *We are very different to the average non-Muslim woman. We are doing everything that the media tells us we shouldn't be doing in terms of how women should dress.*
>
> Roukia, 27 years old

> *In Western societies men are used to seeing women in all their glory really, aren't they? I think men appreciate the fact that they can see a woman's face and that they can see her figure. They probably feel deprived of this opportunity because they can't assess a Muslim woman in the same way that they can assess a Christian, Sikh or Hindu woman.*
>
> Aleena, 28 years old

In this sense, the face and body of a woman is an object of sexual attraction and when these are covered it disrupts public expectations of how women should behave and dress in public in order to visually 'please' men. This emphasises the 'appropriate' feminine sexuality, which ensures that the behaviour and attire of women are strictly monitored (Dwyer, 1999). This was evident in incidents where participants were subjected to remarks of a sexual nature which were often accompanied by menacing staring, sexual gestures, whistling and kissing noises made by (mostly white young) men on the street.

Give us a flash!

Alima, 20 years old

Show me what you're wearing under there!

Ruqiia, 17 years old

This form of sexual harassment is motivated by a male gaze that desires possession of women's bodies and 'wants to see' (Al-Saji, 2010). As a solution to this 'problem', perpetrators often demanded that participants uncovered their face and body by shouting 'Take it off' and 'Show me your face'. In particular, one participant was approached by a man who shouted:

I want to cut that black thing off your face!

Halimah, 19 years old

These findings lend weight to the view that there is a male desire to uncover the female Muslim body which is covered in public (Dwyer, 1999). This was also evident in the following comments made exclusively by white young men:

Why don't you take it off? Are you not hot in that?

Jahidah, 22 years old

What's that on your face? Why are you covering it?

Sarah, 31 years old

Why are you covered up and your children are not covered up?

Raja, 40 years old

Take that shit off your face!

Why do you have a mask on? Are you really ugly under there?

Focus group participants

As is clear from the last quote given above, participants were subjected to sexist remarks and this mirrors a society that glorifies physical beauty. Furthermore, participants reported that they were used as a form of entertainment. For example, perpetrators called them names such as 'Ninja', 'Catwoman', 'Batman', 'Darth Vader', 'Ghost woman', 'Bin bag', 'Letterbox' and 'Postbox'. In a similar fashion, perpetrators had asked them sarcastic questions such as:

Is it Halloween?

Where's your samurai?

Focus group participants

As is clear from these comments, verbal abuse targeted at veiled Muslim women can also be disguised as a joke. Additionally, participants revealed that they had been subjected to swearing such as 'Muslim bitch' and 'Muslim whore'. Participants stated that sometimes people on the street – mainly older white English women – made comments such as 'Disgusting', 'Silly', 'Move further' and 'Get away from here' in order to express their disapproval of the wearing of the veil 'in their country'. In some cases, people on the street purposefully made negative comments about the veil so that participants could hear them. Such incidents included people saying to each other:

I agree with the veil ban in France.

Alia, 34 years old

I'm glad that I don't have to wear that!

Zareena, 22 years old

What's behind there?

Mona, 38 years old

Though alarming enough when taken in isolation, these examples of verbal abuse were made all the more harrowing by the fact that they were sometimes accompanied by physical abuse.

6.2.2 Physical abuse

As discussed in Chapter Three, gendered and essentialised perceptions of veiled Muslim women as oppressed and powerless coupled with popular stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists or terrorist sympathisers render veiled Muslim women 'acceptable' targets for violent attacks in public. Correspondingly, participants described being aware that the wearing of the veil made them identifiable as Muslims and as a result the physical abuse that they suffered in public was a direct implication of the practice of veiling. In this regard, incidents of physical abuse involved attempted and actual physical assaults (including taking the veil off), pushing, shoving, being spat at and even incidents where passing vehicles had attempted to run them over.

Taking the veil off and getting slapped in the face; that was in Lincolnshire.

Iman, 37 years old

I was six months pregnant with my first baby and a white man elbowed me in the stomach when I was in the queue at Boots in Coventry.

Kalila, 29 years old

I was beaten up in the park [in Southampton]. Nobody stepped in to help me.

Salimah, 22 years old

I was walking on London Road [in Leicester] and this man was driving a van. Instead of going straight he saw me wearing the niqab and he came straight to me, knocked the pavement, nearly crashed onto me and then drove off.

Focus group participant

I asked participants whether other people would normally intervene to help or defend them but it was clear that no one had stepped in to offer assistance. In contrast, bystanders often jumped on the bandwagon and started abusing them as well.

Once I was in town [Leicester city centre] and somebody pulled my niqab off. He did it on purpose. Nobody stepped in to help me. People tend to look away.

Anisa, 25 years old

So far nobody has ever come to my defence whereas if something happened to you I would definitely step in.

Samina, 35 years old

I got on the bus and a woman with a pushchair called me a 'Dirty Muslim' and spat at me, and then other people started calling me names too. The bus driver did not intervene.

Sabirah, 35 years old

Participants also described incidents where people on the street or from moving cars had thrown at them eggs, stones, alcohol, water bombs, bottles, take-away food and rubbish. The following quotations are just some of the many examples from participants' accounts that help to illustrate this point.

I've had cups of tea thrown at me from a van. There was a building firm on my street and I was going to the mosque [in Leicester] and the man looked out of his window, had his cup of tea and threw it on me. When I complained he started swearing at me. He said 'Don't make it a big deal, fuck off'.

Yasmine, 28 years old

I was waiting at the bus stop [in Peterborough] and some lads threw a lit cigarette on my jilbab.

Nadia, 29 years old

Generally speaking, physical abuse is the most easily recognised form of abuse by victims. However, despite the seriousness of the aforementioned attacks, they were not always interpreted as forms of physical abuse *per se* by participants, especially if they had not sustained serious physical injuries. Instead, participants understood this violence as 'part and parcel' of wearing the veil in a post-9/11 era; hence they did not report these incidents to the police. The reasons for non-reporting will be examined further in the next chapter.

Although criminal damage was not a form of Islamophobic victimisation that I explicitly asked participants about (as the study focuses on manifestations of Islamophobia targeted at veiled Muslim women in public places) it became evident that some participants had experienced some serious incidents of criminal damage such as graffiti, eggs thrown at the property, alcohol or petrol poured through the letterbox, as well as bacon, pork, ham and dog excrement put through the letterbox or sent via post. Bowling (2009) argues that persistent attacks on property are also attacks on those inside the dwelling (whether or not they are present at the time of the incident). For Aisha, a Somali college student, the house was seen as a form of veiling on the basis that it protected her from the male gaze and sexual harassment. However, Aisha had bricks thrown through the windows of her house (located in Saffron Lane, which is a traditionally white area of Leicester) the very first day she wore the veil. Subsequently, Aisha took the veil off in order to keep both herself and her family safe from further abuse

but since moving to the area of St. Matthews in Leicester (which is heavily populated by the Somali community) she felt safe to wear the veil again. Similarly, other participants reported being targeted with threatening or abusive hate mail, which often involved death threats.

> *We had a letter come through the post. It had a white powder in there and it said 'We hate Muslims' and also there was a razor blade in the letter.*
>
> Raja, 40 years old

6.2.3 'Invisible' forms of Islamophobic victimisation

Similar to racism and hate crime, manifestations of Islamophobia form a part of victims' everyday activities and this reality makes it difficult for victims to recognise or acknowledge the different forms of Islamophobic abuse as such (Bowling, 2003). Given that participants were multiple and repeat victims of Islamophobia, incidents of intimidation and abuse were often seen as 'normal'. In line with the suggestions of authors such as Kelly (1987) and Bowling (1999; 2003) participants found it difficult to talk specifically about separate incidents of Islamophobic victimisation as this was seen as a problem that they faced on a daily basis in public. This necessitates looking at the continuity of veiled Muslim women's victimisation experiences rather than looking at them individually.

Within this framework, participants described 'invisible' forms of Islamophobic victimisation. By 'invisible' forms, I am referring to what might be best described as subtle and potentially more pervasive manifestations of Islamophobia. This can be the case where Islamophobia is manifested in a less overt manner than that typically associated with Islamophobic incidents and this highlights the importance of appreciating Islamophobic victimisation as a continuum rather than as one-off incidents (as shall be discussed later in this chapter). Correspondingly, none of the behaviour listed below would be defined in law (or by the participants themselves) as Islamophobic victimisation. For example, unnecessary or persistent staring was a common theme which underpinned participants' accounts as they described their experiences in public.

If staring could kill, I would be dead by now.

Focus group participant

Other students look at me and think 'She is probably going to blow us up one day'.

Aliyah, 18 years old

When you enter Highcross [Shopping Centre in Leicester] people will normally hold the door for you, but they will not hold the door for me.

Sabah, 27 years old

It can be done in subtle ways. People might say 'Do you need a translator?' and talk to me really slowly or very loudly.

Nimah, 28 years old

As the last quotation shows, common perceptions that veiled Muslim women do not speak English (since they are all immigrants) are further illustrations of 'invisible' Islamophobic victimisation. Other examples included being ignored, being laughed at, being monitored at shops and being stalked by strangers on the street. In particular, several participants found themselves being followed around in shops by security officers who feared that participants might have stolen something because they were veiled.

Once I was in Morrisons in Manchester and the security officer kept walking around me so I said to him 'Is something wrong? You keep walking around me'. He said 'No, I am just monitoring' and I said 'But why do you keep walking around me?' and he said 'Because of you being covered like this, it is very easy for you to take things'. I said 'To take things? In other words you're saying that it is easy for me to steal?'

Rahimah, 44 years old

Moreover, a couple of participants reported that people sometimes took photographs of them (without asking their permission) whilst others revealed that they had been victims of stalking, illustrations of which are presented below.

> *I was walking on the street [in London] and this guy was following me. He was saying 'Come on show me your face, show me your face' and after a few streets I took my niqab off and showed him my face. I was so scared that I took it off. After a couple of streets down I put it back on again.*
>
> Salimah, 22 years old

> *I was walking in town [Leicester city centre] and this man followed me home. He saw I was a single woman in the house with a child. I didn't have money to buy the curtains. He used to come and knock on the door. I told the Council what was going on and they gave me a house in another estate.*
>
> Johara, 35 years old

Furthermore, participants reported that they were often treated as 'second class' citizens in the sense that people acted as if they were 'invisible'. This sense of 'invisibility' is in line with the targeted victimisation of certain groups or individuals who are judged to be 'different' and whose perceived disadvantages make them appear an 'easy target' (Chakraborti and Garland, 2012). Hate crime perpetrators routinely perceive their targets as weak, defenceless, powerless or with a limited capacity to resist. Certainly, while being 'different' does not automatically mean that someone is singled out for harassment or abuse, it can mean that those in vulnerable situations are at heightened risk of victimisation (Chakraborti and Garland, 2012). Accordingly, participants reported that some bus drivers refused to stop or open the doors for them when standing at bus stops on their own. Other participants reported that they had been ignored or refused to be served in shops, as exemplified by the following dialogue in the context of a focus group interview.

Participant A: Sometimes when I go to the shops and I'm waiting to pay, the people who are serving me pretend they can't see me because my face is covered and they'll serve other customers. If I was a white woman wearing Western clothes they wouldn't really ignore me.

Participant B: I've been ignored in shops too. I was going to the till and I wasn't called although they were free and I said 'Excuse me, I'm standing here'.

Focus group participants

6.3 Pattern of Islamophobic victimisation

6.3.1 Frequency and context

The findings described above show that experiences of Islamophobic victimisation can take a variety of different forms which may not be recognised or acknowledged as serious or even Islamophobic *per se* unless seen in context as part of the broader processes of targeted abuse and hostility that feature within veiled Muslim women's everyday lives. From this perspective, the targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women is an everyday phenomenon which can be better understood as a process rather than as 'one-off' or incidental occurrences. This ties in with the suggestions of Williams and Tregidga (2013) who found that targeted victimisation was serial rather than singular. As such, understanding Islamophobic victimisation as a process highlights the ongoing nature of this form of targeted violence in a way that events-oriented constructions of Islamophobic victimisation fail to account for, and this would certainly seem to be an appropriate way in which to view the experiences of Islamophobia described by participants in this study.

For the majority of participants conceiving of Islamophobic victimisation as 'normal' was based on the fact that it happened 'almost daily' although there were certain factors which determined the frequency of the abuse. For example, if participants were accompanied by a male companion, they were less likely to be verbally or physically attacked. This is in line with the suggestions of the Open Society Foundations (2011) who found that veiled

Muslim women in France were less likely to suffer abuse when they were walking on the street with a male relative. Within the present study, participants pointed out that although abuse and hostility was almost an everyday occurrence it was also random in the sense that it could happen anytime and anywhere, as exemplified by the following comments:

> *If you were to step into Muslim shoes for a day, you would notice that it's very common but it's quite random as well. Like today, I didn't expect an old man to give me abuse on my way here [to the Department of Criminology, University of Leicester where the interview took place].*
>
> Alima, 20 years old

> *I don't think there is a week that goes by without anything. If I went out every day to town, I'd definitely be getting something happening to me daily. Either ignoring, name-calling, pushing, shoulder turning or nose being held up. I don't know why. I don't smell. I have a bath. I don't know why people treat me like that. I don't think there's ever been a year, a month, a week or even a day when nothing, absolutely nothing has happened.*
>
> Layla, 38 years old

Although a large number of these incidents occurred on the street sometimes they took place in environments where a person would normally feel safe such as General Practitioner (GP) surgeries and hospitals. For example, whilst waiting at the GP surgery Aisha, a white middle-aged convert to Islam, said to a white English woman who was sitting next to her 'Oh, the doctor is late' and the woman replied to her 'I don't talk to people without a face'. Aisha, who had recently converted to Islam, soon realised that her veil was perceived as a barrier to communication. Another incident shows how veiled Muslim women can be victimised when they are most vulnerable such as when being admitted to hospital.

I was very sick so I went to the hospital [in Leicester]. The first night the porter came to take me for the x-ray he said 'ninja-ninja' but I kept quiet.

Hajiba, 72 years old

Moreover, a picture emerges whereby veiled Muslim women are verbally abused by other passengers when travelling. For example, Sumeya and her sister (also veiled) were travelling to London and a white elderly woman on the tube shouted to them 'What are you two witches doing here?' Participants pointed out that sometimes the abuse came from the bus drivers themselves when travelling by bus. As the quotation shows below, Zainab had felt intimidated by bus drivers on many occasions. It is important to note that Zainab was visibly vulnerable on many levels including her poor eyesight and mobility problems which were exacerbated by her body shape and size. Zainab also revealed that she felt very vulnerable because she had suffered domestic violence from her previous husband.

I've got a bus pass because of my disabilities and in the bus pass I don't have my niqab on because it is not allowed to wear niqab in identity so I normally show it but some drivers, even those who wear the turban, shout at me and make me take my niqab off.

Zainab, 37 years old

From an intersectional perspective, this extract illustrates the interplay between religion, gender and physical disability in specific situations of hostility targeted at veiled Muslim women. As Sallah (2010) notes, intersectionality is a sociological theory that holds that constructed notions of 'difference' impact upon a particular group simultaneously, resulting in a cumulative effect. As such, intersectionality can be understood as a nexus of identities that work together to render veiled Muslim women an 'easy' target to attack, especially in the minds of their abusers (see also Yuval-Davis, 2011). This means that some veiled Muslim women may seem more vulnerable due to certain aspects of their identity coupled with the visibility of their Muslim identity. This is a point worth noting as it helps us to recognise

that veiled Muslim women who have experienced Islamophobia will all have their own distinct individual experiences in addition to common patterns of this victimisation. For example, Zainab's experiences in public show that the interesectionality of identities can mark a veiled Muslim woman as an 'ideal' target to attack by virtue of being vulnerable on multiple levels such as religion, gender and physical disability. Similarly, during the course of interviews and focus groups it became apparent that participants who were very young or very old, and those who had 'visible' physical or mental disabilities (including speech or language difficulties) felt very vulnerable, partly because they would not be able to defend themselves.

> *I'm an elderly woman and being treated like that is a horrible experience.*
>
> Hajiba, 72 years old

In a similar vein, other participants felt that their body size also contributed to their vulnerability and victimisation, as the following comment indicates:

> *I consider myself short and attacking a small woman like me is a very cowardly act.*
>
> Shelina, 36 years old

Comments like this suggest that hate crime needs to be more attuned to the intersectional nature of identity (see also Chakraborti and Garland, 2012; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Indeed, the notion of intersectionality of identities demonstrates that veiled Muslim women may be targeted not just for their group membership but because they are stereotypically perceived as 'easy' and 'soft' targets. This lends weight to Chakraborti and Garland's (2012) argument that perceived vulnerability and 'difference', rather than identity and group membership alone, are relevant factors in the commission of hate offences. They note that the intersections between a range of identity characteristics – including sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, gender, age, class, mental health, bodily shape and appearance – are seldom given adequate recognition within the domains of hate crime scholarship and

policy. Similarly, Moran and Sharpe (2004) and Perry (2001) suggest that gay and transgendered people may be targeted because they too 'stand out' from accepted gender norms, while Hodkinson (2002) argues that male goths are harassed due to their 'effeminate' appearance as well as their membership of an alternative subculture, leaving them especially vulnerable through this intersection of two aspects of their identity. Within this study, it is not simply the visibility of their Muslim identity that renders veiled Muslim women vulnerable; rather, they may be targeted because of how their Muslim identity intersects with other aspects of their self, and with other situational factors and context, to make them vulnerable in the eyes of their abusers.

6.3.2 Profile of perpetrators

The majority of incidents experienced by participants involved individuals or groups of young males who were unknown to them. Specifically, participants' accounts indicated that the majority of the people who abused them in public were white men, aged between 16 and 25, although Islamophobic abuse also came from children and older people. Certainly, the issue of 'whiteness' is unsurprising to some extent because the general population is overwhelmingly white in the UK, as the 2011 Census figures showed in Chapter Three. In terms of gender, most participants emphasised that men were more likely to be physically abusive towards them while women were more likely to persistently stare at them or make a negative comment, especially when they were in a group. However, not all participants agreed with this viewpoint, as the following comments illustrate:

> *Women tend to stare more unless they are in a group. Then they are more likely to be verbally abusive. Men will not just be verbally abusive. They will pull your veil off, push you or spit on you.*
>
> Shantaz, 38 years old

> *For me it can be anybody. At the beginning it was mostly men but now I get a lot of abuse from women as well. Women can be very offensive and they will say and do horrible things to us.*
>
> Raja, 40 years old

Furthermore, some participants pointed out that they got abuse even from young children, as the following extract suggests:

> *I was coming here [mosque where the focus group interview took place] and I heard children, they were not all white children, shouting 'There is a ninja in this car' and then they threw snow at my car. I could tell it was children from the council estate.*
>
> Nisha, 28 years old

In terms of perceived social class, participants stated that it was mainly 'working-class people' who were abusive towards them; nevertheless, some participants highlighted that the 'middle and upper classes' were equally Islamophobic but they would manifest their anti-Muslim sentiments in a more 'subtle' way.

> *[Irene: How do you know it is working-class people?] I can tell from the accent and even the clothing. The majority of them are below working class. They are not even working class. They are just unemployed people who have nothing better to do and it's like 'Let's have a bit of a laugh'.*
>
> Hasna, 43 years old

> *The higher social class people have a sophisticated way of being racists. They will snob us, ignore us, they won't really say something but they will move if I sit next to them.*
>
> Focus group participant

Given these observations, it is important to highlight that the profile of the perpetrators as being 'young, white, working-class men' does not tell the whole story. Mason (2005) disagrees with the pursuit of 'one size fits all' explanations in the context of hate crime. According to Chakraborti and Garland (2012), hate crimes are often committed by relatively 'ordinary' people in the context of their everyday lives. Iganski and Levin (2004) found that hate crime is often perpetrated by 'ordinary' members of the community

rather than right-wing extremists. Within the present study, participants pointed out that sometimes the abuse came from members of ethnic and racial minorities such as black and Asian people, whereas participants expected that people who were also 'different' by virtue of their ethnicity, race or religion would be sympathetic towards their plight. Participants found it astonishing that even European nationals – for example immigrants from Poland, Bulgaria and Cyprus – could be equally Islamophobic. Despite their status as immigrants and therefore being supposedly 'other' themselves, European nationals felt they had the right to attack veiled Muslim women because of their 'white privilege' and 'Christian superiority'. This demonstrates that people who are part of minority groups can exhibit racist attitudes towards 'other' minority communities. However, it is important to acknowledge that the study did not speak to perpetrators and therefore it is not possible to identify the motivations that drove them to commit the acts that they did; rather we rely on victims' testimony in order to draw conclusions about offenders' motivations.

> *I don't know how other sisters feel but for me Asians are racist as well. I have come across that, the specific comment was 'Bitch take that off your face' and that wasn't from a white person.*
>
> *I got really shocked when I had a comment from another Asian person, an Asian man, just nearby here [mosque where the focus group interview took place]. That was really shocking because I felt that my 'comfort zone' is no longer my comfort zone.*
>
> *We have a tough time with Eastern Europeans. Blatant mocking and laughing in our face and all in another language has left us bewildered as well as hurt.*
>
> Focus group participants

Moreover, a few participants revealed that they had suffered abuse from fellow Muslims. In this context, the abuse came from members of the Muslim community who saw themselves as 'Westernised' or 'non-practising' Muslims. Surprisingly enough, in some cases the abuse came from within the Muslim family. These findings are illustrated in the following comments:

> *It's not just about Islamophobia coming from non-Muslims. There are also Muslims who don't like the niqab. They say to me that we shouldn't wear it because we give them a bad name. We have it from both sides, Muslims and non-Muslims.*
>
> *How can I blame a person on the street when I've had problems from my own [Muslim] family? How do I have the right to wear it in public when my whole family doesn't agree with it?*
>
> Focus group participants

As is clear from these comments, Islamophobia exists within the Muslim community and even within the Muslim family itself. Participants explained that some Muslim parents accept and encourage their daughters to wear the *hijab* but do not like the *niqab*, viewing the latter as an extreme form of practising Islam. Other Muslim parents are not necessarily opposed to the wearing of the veil itself but fear for their daughters' safety. For those participants who had converted to Islam, family members objected vehemently to becoming Muslims, let alone supporting their decision to wear the veil. Throughout interviews and focus group discussions, it was clear that converts to Islam often felt obliged to hide the fact that they wore the veil in order to 'keep the peace' with their (non-Muslim) family whilst others were sometimes forced to cut off communication with their (non-Muslim) family due to intense disagreements about their decision to convert to Islam.

> *When I visit my [non-Muslim] parents I take my niqab off and I keep the hijab on, but even with the hijab they are not happy.*
>
> Zoe, 27 years old

> *My parents don't like the fact that I'm wearing a niqab. My mum especially, she finds it hard to deal with it so when I go to meet them I take it off out of respect so that they don't feel uncomfortable with me in public.*
>
> Focus group participant

Collectively, the vast majority of participants (both converts and those who were born into Islam) had decided to move to Leicester in the belief that this would constitute the beginning of a 'new' life. In this regard, participants saw Leicester as a place where they would be safe to practise the veil. However, the reality of living in Leicester fell short of participants' expectations, as the following discussion demonstrates.

6.3.3 The significance of location

Outside of London, the East Midlands and Leicester in particular is one of the most diverse regions of contemporary Britain whether considered demographically, geographically, ethnically or religiously. Leicester is seen as inclusive, multicultural and is heralded both nationally and internationally as a city of harmony and good practice. A large number of participants had decided to move to Leicester from other parts of the UK (and even from other European countries such as France) in the belief that Leicester would provide a better life for them and their families.

Indeed, Leicester provides Muslims with an authentic Islamic lifestyle based on its extensive infrastructure: veils, mosques with minarets, madrasahs (Islamic educational institutions), halal shops and Muslim cemeteries. In the words of Sallah (2010: 18), one can 'feel and breathe Islam' in Leicester by virtue of its vibrant and thriving Muslim community. In light of this, participants felt confident that they would be safe to practise the veil in Leicester because of its high population of Muslims and veil wearing women. This ties in with the suggestions of Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) who found that Muslims are at less risk of attack when they are in areas of high Muslim population. For most participants, hostility was a regular feature of living in communities unfamiliar with 'difference' but they soon realised that Islamophobia exists even within a multicultural city such as

Leicester, albeit to a lesser degree than other cities in the UK (or elsewhere in Europe). As the following comments illustrate, there were mixed feelings about notions of safety in Leicester.

> *It is worse elsewhere but there are racist people even in Leicester. We moved to Leicester because it's a safer community here. It's better for our children as well. I didn't want my daughters seeing all the hostility I saw in Coventry. Leicester is more tolerant but there is still Islamophobia.*
>
> Madihah, 36 years old

> *In Glasgow when I go shopping people turn and look at me. I feel they want to let me know that I'm different from everybody else because of my veil. But the English are worse than the Scottish. The Scottish, they may be racist but they are more jovial, it's not with hatred, it's not with a sense of repulsion or a sense of vindictiveness. They'll be racist towards you as a joke and you can joke back with them. In Glasgow I'll get a lot more stares but I won't get as much abuse. In the whole time I've been in Leicester, I've had more abuse than I had in Glasgow.*
>
> Rasheeda, 38 years old

> *My husband chose Leicester. We had to leave [the Netherlands] because my kids were growing up in an environment where people were shouting at me, pushing me. I'm sure it will happen here but not as often as it would happen there. We are a bit more sheltered here but no matter how diverse a place is, it's always going to happen.*
>
> *I don't understand why everyone says Leicester is safe. It's much easier to do niqab in Birmingham.*
>
> Focus group participants

It is important to note that the level of abuse that participants faced depended upon whether they were in their local community or whether they were leaving their 'comfort zone', for instance by taking the bus or train to go to less familiar areas that did not accommodate 'difference'. Some participants referred to 'no-go zones' for Muslims in Leicester such as the traditionally white areas of Braunstone, Beaumont Leys, Saffron Lane, New Park, Hamilton and even Leicester city centre where they would mix with 'outsiders' – that is, non-Muslim residents and visitors to Leicester.

However, participants felt that the UK was more tolerant in comparison to other European countries such as France, Italy, Germany and Greece as well as Muslim countries such as Egypt and Turkey. This ties in with the suggestions of Scott-Baumann (2011) who argued that the UK provides a more veil-friendly environment than many European countries such as France where the *hijab* is banned in schools and within the civil service, and the *niqab* is banned in public. Similarly, Sallah (2010) found that Muslims felt more 'accepted' in Leicester in comparison to their experiences of living elsewhere before moving to Leicester. Certainly, traditional Islamic States such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Yemen were seen by many participants as the 'ideal' country for practising Muslims to live in.

> *When I went to Athens on holiday I did notice that I got a lot more stares there than I did in the UK. Nobody said anything but it was obvious that people were making a point of looking at me. I tried to smile*[36] *to people but they just blanked me.*
>
> Maryam, 28 years old

> *In Turkey I was treated very badly because of my veil … they don't like women wearing veils because they assume that we are from Saudi and they don't like Saudis.*
>
> Sabah, 32 years old

[36] Maryam felt that although she wore the veil, people could still see her smile through her eyes. Similarly, many participants said that when they smiled, their eyes 'smiled' too.

> *I've had the experience of living in Saudi Arabia and I can see the difference. I felt so much at peace there. I felt 'This is where I belong'. As soon as I'm here, it feels like we are at war, psychological war, a war of ideas, a war of culture, a war of our way of life. After living in England for eight years and then going to Saudi it was strange walking down the street and no one abusing me, nobody staring at me, nobody thinking I am the enemy. There we blend in so easily.*
>
> Focus group participant

The notion of location highlights the relevance of obvious disadvantages to the process of victim selection. Indeed, location is one of the main factors that make veiled Muslim women more or less vulnerable to Islamophobic victimisation. As Chakraborti and Garland (2012) observe in the context of hate crime, it is not someone's identity *per se* that renders them vulnerable but rather the way in which aspects of their identity intersect with other aspects of their self and with other situational factors and context including individuals' location. Green (2007) argues that the higher rates of victimisation amongst black and minority ethnic communities are relevant to the area they live in, in addition to victims' ethnicity or race. At the same time, potential targets of hate crime may be less likely to become a victim by virtue of living at a greater distance from prejudiced neighbours or in less overtly hostile environments (Walters and Hoyle, 2012). This discussion coincides with our earlier contention that the interplay of identities with one another and with other personal, social and situational characteristics renders veiled Muslim women a vulnerable target in the eyes of their abusers. We will return to this issue when we examine the impact of Islamophobic victimisation upon veiled Muslim women, particularly in terms of their sense of vulnerability according to their location.

6.3.4 Vulnerability post-9/11

Before examining the impact of Islamophobic victimisation upon veiled Muslim women, it is important to highlight that prior to 9/11 participants' status as visibly practising Muslims did not raise the risk of being attacked in public. Throughout interviews and focus group discussions participants pointed out that since 9/11 there has been a dramatic increase in the levels of hostility that they had experienced in the UK and elsewhere. Choudhury and Fenwick (2011) argue that the phenomenon of Islamophobia in the UK since 2001 can be attributed to the fact that Islam and Muslims are seen as responsible for the actions of the terrorists of 9/11 (see also Human Rights First, 2007). Correspondingly, Lambert and Githens-Mazer (2011) found that prior to 9/11 there is literally no evidence of anti-Muslim hate crime attacks on Muslims as 'terrorists'. Unarguably, the events of 9/11 served as a catalyst for determining the Muslim identity on a collective scale, notably that all Muslims are terrorists or terrorist sympathisers and that Islam promotes gender oppression and violence. Similarly, the terrorist attacks of 7/7 and the wider recognition of the threat – both perceived and real – from 'home-grown' terrorism prompted a backlash against Muslim communities in the UK (as elsewhere).

> *Before 9/11 we were invisible and now all of a sudden we are visible. It's like we exist now. Before we were ignored but that was easier to deal with. Now we get the stares, the name-calling, the aggression, the hatred. People are now quite expressive in terms of their disgust for us.*
>
> Arifa, 48 years old

It is likely that the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia can be influenced by local, national and global events. Several participants stated that the frequency of Islamophobic attacks was heightened whenever a high profile terrorist incident occurred in the UK or elsewhere in the world, and the media reporting identified the perpetrators as 'Muslim', 'Islamic' or 'Islamist' – a perception that offers support to the contention that terrorist attacks in the name of Islam bear influence on the

frequency with which perceived or actual Muslims are victimised (Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011). There were also suggestions that the frequency of anti-Muslim hostility increased in instances when the EDL marches were in the media spotlight. Lambert and Githens-Mazer (2011) argue that both national and local media do little to highlight the violence against Muslims and much to exacerbate it. They observe that post-9/11 certain politicians and certain sections of the media have promoted and encouraged Islamophobic sentiments whilst ignoring how readily Islamophobic comments can foster a climate in which violence against Muslims gains licence and tacit approval (Lambert and Githens-Mazer, 2011).

> *After September 11 everything changed for Muslims but that was for Muslims in general. After Jack Straw's comments [about the veil as a visible statement of separation and of difference] it is all about Muslim women in veil. Before Jack Straw made these comments I felt safe. It saddens me because Jack Straw had such a support from the Muslim community in Blackburn. I remember hearing his comments on the BBC News and thinking 'You are only going to spill anger instead of building bridges for a better understanding of Muslims, what you do is creating Islamophobia'. If politicians can attack Muslim women in veil then what stops an ordinary person on the street doing the same?*
>
> Zafirah, 33 years old

> *Lord Pearson was on BBC 5 radio and he said he wanted to ban the veil in the UK. He said we promote terrorism but where is the evidence? Yeah, we may be mothers of terrorists but I've never come across a woman dressed in niqab who promotes terrorism.*
>
> Aisha, 34 years old

> *The French veil ban is a form of Islamophobia. We are attacked verbally and physically and through the ideology that the media and politicians are promoting.*
>
> Hasna, 43 years old

Moreover, participants who had worn the *niqab* for many years stated that hostility towards them had increased significantly since the French veil ban.

> *It has given people an excuse to attack women in niqab. I read blogs about banning the veil and most comments are like 'They should ban it here as well'. I think it's getting worse now anyway. I don't think it's safe for us anymore to walk on the street. As time goes by it will get worse.*
>
> *France's action has given British people the right to say things that they wouldn't have said before. So whereas before they'd keep it quiet because they know that British values are different, that we are tolerant and very pro-multicultural, the moment France banned the veil, suddenly these people thought 'Right, now we've got a voice, now we've got justification, now we can talk because if the government in France thinks this is illegal, it's ok for us to raise our racist opinions'.*
>
> Focus group participants

> *My friends in France tell me that they don't go out. They continue to wear it because they don't want to take it off. For them it feels like stripping off if they don't wear it, so they stay inside the house and they don't go out. The law started in April 2010 and one of my friends told me on the phone that she has not been out of the house since then. My husband and I decided to leave France when the debate started there.*
>
> Kamil, 30 years old

Against the background of media debates on whether the veil should be banned in the UK, participants were convinced that it was their distinctive Muslim appearance that made them a target. Participants also felt more vulnerable in comparison to Muslim men on the basis of their gender.

The more you dress as a Muslim, the more you are going to be seen as a threat because you are personifying what they see as evil.

Shelina, 36 years old

On the news they portray women who wear a veil as oppressed but I am not oppressed. If you ask my husband he'll say I wear the trousers in the house. What I don't understand is if people think we are oppressed and we're forced to wear it, why do they attack us about it? They don't attack Muslim men. They attack Muslim women in veil.

Zafirah, 33 years old

We stand out so much, when we walk into town everyone knows we are Muslims. As women we are more vulnerable as well. It is easier to attack a woman in niqab rather than attacking a Muslim man with the beard.

We are the weak sex. People are more reluctant to say things to Muslim men because they are men.

Focus group participants

Moreover, participants felt that they faced increased levels of abuse and hostility in comparison to Muslim women who wore the headscarf. It is worth pointing out that before deciding to wear the *niqab*, most participants used to wear the *hijab* and this allowed them to see the difference in terms of people's reactions before and after they wore the veil. However, a couple of participants disagreed with this view and argued that women in *hijab* are equally targeted.

The hardest thing any woman can put on is the niqab. The scarf is easy. It's nothing compared to the niqab.

Sahar, 47 years old

Participant A: I've had more abuse when I wore my niqab than I did when I wore the hijab. British people can accommodate and tolerate the hijab but when you wear the niqab you are a terrorist straight away. If you wear the hijab in a Western way, say with jeans, you seem to fit in society but the niqab stands out.

Participant B: I don't wear the niqab all the time [only wears it in mixed gatherings such as weddings] but I feel we still face the same hostility because we are categorised in the same group as 'Muslim women' whether we wear the veil or whether we wear the hijab.

Focus group participants

6.3.5 Islamophobia as a form of racism

With these points in mind, it is important to draw out the differences between the different groups of participants. In this respect, a more revealing picture emerges when the findings are considered in relation to participants' previous experiences of victimisation. As discussed above, prior to 9/11 participants' status as visibly practising Muslims did not raise the risk of abuse or violence. However, all interviewees (with the exception of white British converts to Islam) reported that they were victims of racist attacks – often described by perpetrators as 'Paki-bashing' – in the 1980s and victims of Islamophobia post 9/11. For these participants, Islamophobic victimisation was understood as a 'new' form of racism on the basis that there was a shift from race to religion. While the 'old' racism was based on an explicit belief on biological superiority, the 'new' racism is based on notions of religious and cultural superiority (Allen, 2010a).

We had racial abuse in the early 80s when we first came to England. I had people shouting 'Paki' and 'Go back to your country' but now it's more 'You are a terrorist' so the abuse changed from race to religion.

Alisha, 44 years old

In the early 70s there was a time when skinheads were about and once they basically set alight a whole street, cars, bins everything. We were all scared to go out of the house. For a few days we couldn't get out. Even the police were too scared to intervene.

Dahab, 52 years old

It reminds me of my childhood in Yorkshire and the abuse I got because of the colour of my skin. When I was a teenager I wanted to have white skin. I wanted to be like everybody else. I felt I didn't fit in but now I wouldn't take my veil off.

Zohra, 43 years old

We used to live in Brixton. We used to get chased a lot by skinheads. We couldn't even go to the park. It was that bad.

Sahar, 47 years old

Lambert and Githens-Mazer (2011) point out that 'Paki-bashing' has been replaced by 'Muslim-bashing' as a new dangerous street phenomenon. Whereas ten years ago perpetrators might have focused on black and Asian people as potential targets now their sole focus for attack are Muslims. In light of the serious racist attacks that some participants had suffered, experiences of Islamophobic victimisation felt like 'history repeating itself'. However, the white English converts who took part in the study had very different experiences to the black and Asian respondents who were born into Islam. Converts to Islam spoke of the sharp contrast in people's behaviour towards them after they wore the veil and this is something that I had experienced myself during the ethnographic part of the study when I wore the veil in public. The fact that I do not normally wear the veil allowed me to see the difference in people's behaviour. There were numerous occasions where I felt all too aware of my veil by virtue of being stared at persistently, being called names such as 'Ninja', 'Terrorist' and 'Muslim bomber' as well as being ignored in shops in Leicester where I was a regular customer and the staff would normally engage with me in a friendly manner. On one level, when a veiled Muslim woman is targeted the offender will not be aware of the ethnic

identity of the victim; however, being white indicates that this person is likely to be a convert to Islam. From this perspective, white veiled Muslim women are routinely perceived as British converts and thus they are targeted for their decision to convert to Islam. In the eyes of their abusers, converts have supposedly betrayed the British values and the British way of life, as the following comments indicate.

> *I used to live in Croydon and there were some guys making comments like 'You are a traitor going against the values of our country'. I'm English so I get more abuse because they see me as a traitor.*
>
> Zoe, 27 years old

> *They know I'm English. They can see my eye colour, it's blue. They can see the colour of my skin, it's white. They can hear my English accent. They can see my daughter, she's English. People think I've moved over to the dark side. For them Islam is the enemy.*
>
> Sarah, 31 years old

> *I never had any abuse before. It's definitely because of the way I dress. When I didn't wear it, people were treating me like a normal human being and now they treat me like I am sub-human. Now they don't see me as a person. They look at my veil and they've got this image in their minds that we are all terrorists and our religion is evil. I know the mentality. I'm English. I know what they're like.*
>
> Lina, 42 years old

6.4 Impact of Islamophobic victimisation

6.4.1 Implications for victims

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, their families and wider communities. Empirical studies of targeted victimisation emphasise the more severe impact for victims of hate crime when compared to non-hate victims (see also Garland and Chakraborti, 2006; Hall, 2005; Herek *et al*., 2002; McDevitt *et al*., 2001; Williams and Tregidga, 2013).

In addition to potentially suffering physical injury, victims of Islamophobia can be seriously affected emotionally. In particular, there are distinct emotional harms associated with this victimisation. Throughout interviews and focus group discussions participants highlighted that they had low confidence and low self-esteem because of experiencing Islamophobia in public. They also pointed out that they were made to feel 'worthless', 'unwanted' and that they 'didn't belong'. For converts to Islam in particular, experiences of Islamophobic victimisation often left them feeling confused and hurt, compounding their sense of isolation. Seen in this context, Islamophobic victimisation disrupts 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 security and belonging whilst the eventual impact is to create fear about living in a particular locality and to inspire a wish to move away (Bowling, 2009). In this way spaces and places are created in which 'others' are made to feel unwelcome and vulnerable to attack, and from which they may eventually be excluded (Bowling, 2009).

> *Everyone thinks we are the enemy. I feel that I don't have the right to be here. It crushes my self-esteem.*
>
> Parveen, 24 years old

> *We feel like social lepers that no one wants to engage with.*
>
> Maryam, 28 years old

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

We've been made to feel that we are totally unwanted. It's like we are a virus to the community.

Focus group participant

Participants also described feelings of shame, self-doubt and guilt. They referred to incidents of Islamophobic victimisation as 'humiliating' and 'embarrassing' whilst feeling powerless to do anything about it. The following comments help to convey the sense of humiliation and embarrassment that veiled Muslim women might feel when experiencing Islamophobic victimisation in public, often in view of people passing by who do not intervene to help them.

I feel humiliated and I feel totally alone even though there are so many people around. If somebody would speak up and say 'Leave her alone, it is up to her how she dresses' but nobody has ever come to my defence.

Kalila, 29 years old

Last year I went to visit my parents in Malawi so at the airport I was in a wheelchair and they made me get up, they really thoroughly checked me and I thought 'Why are they doing that? I am not hiding a bomb in my wheelchair'. It was quite humiliating to be searched like that.

Rafia, 45 years old

It is awful because when they do it, they all do it publicly. There are witnesses all over the place. People are looking but nobody does anything. Nobody says 'It is wrong'.

Karima, 36 years old

Relatedly, the fact that no one would normally intervene to help them had culminated in 'blaming the victim'. In this sense, participants felt responsible and 'guilty' for being attacked on the basis that they were 'different' and 'Muslim', and as a result they 'deserved to be abused'. At the same time, it is likely that self-blaming was a way of making sense of their victimisation. The notion of self-blame is illustrated in the following comments:

When you have someone abusing you like that, you automatically feel 'It's my fault because I'm wearing this'.

Huda, 27 years old

In our religion, it is compulsory not to travel without a man. This is for the safety of women, it is not oppressing women as most people think. If I was with my dad nobody would attack me. They wouldn't try it. So I kind of feel it's my fault if I go out alone and get attacked.

Salimah, 22 years old

We feel we are causing a crime and we are not. We are just covering ourselves; that is not criminal. Well now it is criminal in France but it's not in this country.

Focus group participant

Throughout interviews and focus group discussions participants argued that taking the veil off felt like a sexual attack and as such it had a similar impact upon them. From this perspective, they described feeling frightened, guilty, ashamed and depressed.

Taking the veil off is equal to rape really. I was walking down the street in the local area [Highfields, Leicester] and there were three white men in their early 20s. They took my niqab off from behind. I tried to conceal my face with my scarf and then when I tried to retrieve my niqab they wanted to take a look at me. They bent down to see what I looked like and then they chucked it on the floor. I was still covering my face with my scarf and I just tried to hurry away without running. When I went round the corner I put it on and started crying.

Maha, 40 years old

Although I don't have any bruises to show from the assault, I am damaged and harmed inside as if have been sexually assaulted.

Iman, 37 years old

In light of the profound negative impact this victimisation can have upon victims, respondents highlighted that the emotional scars can last for a long time. When another incident took place they relived previous incidents of Islamophobic victimisation. As a result, some participants suffered from depression, eating disorders such as loss of appetite, bulimia and anorexia, sleep pattern disturbances including insomnia and nightmares, flashbacks and memory lapses. The continual threat of abuse can be emotionally draining for victims who not only relive past incidents but also feel the need to be constantly on the alert, even to the extent that they might become paranoid. This shows that Islamophobic victimisation can result in a cumulative experience of psychological trauma and emotional burnout over time.

Every time somebody shouts, swears or laughs at me I will relive previous incidents that have happened again and again.

Yasmine, 28 years old

I suppose it can make me a little bit paranoid. I always keep my phone ready in case something happens.

Omera, 22 years old

Moreover, several participants felt angry, upset and frustrated on the basis that they were attacked because of their Muslim identity. Hate crime studies have established both specific and generalised frustration and anger on the part of victims – towards the perpetrator and towards a culture of bias and exclusion (see also Craig-Henderson, 2009; Herek *et al*., 2002; McDevitt *et al*., 2001; Williams and Tregidga, 2013). This coincides with our earlier contention that Islamophobia has become embedded in broader patterns of an ideological fear and hostility towards Islam whereby policies have tried to eradicate the visibility of Islam in the West, for example, through veil bans in public in European countries such as France, Belgium and Italy.

I get upset when people say to me 'Go back to your country' because this is my home. I was born here. If you send me back to Pakistan I'd be lost, seriously.

Iffat, 25 years old

We are born and bred here. Where do they want us to go? Where is our future?

We don't belong anywhere. We have no place. It's like we are not wanted anywhere. Sadly to say in Switzerland we can't have minarets or a veil in France.

Focus group participants

However, a couple of participants pointed out that such experiences made their faith in Islam stronger. From this perspective, Islam became a more salient and important marker of identity in response to experiences of anti-Muslim hostility in public. It increased in-group solidarity and identification with their religious identity. It also made them more determined to continue to wear the veil in public. Brown (2001) observes that as Muslim identities have

been constructed as ‘other’ to Western identities, an attempt to distort Muslim identities, or to suppress the symbols of these identities, often has the opposite effect; it strengthens these identities. In this context an attack which is perceived by the individual to be motivated by hatred towards Islam may lead to ‘Islam’ becoming a more predominant part of the person’s self-identity. For Castells (2004), this illustrates the notion of ‘resistance identity’ with which to oppose attempts for social, religious, cultural oppression or assimilation.

Furthermore, many participants reported that Islamophobic victimisation was part of God’s plan to ‘test’ their faith. However, this is something that I purposefully did not challenge as I did not want to offend my participants by questioning how *Allah*, or any God for that matter, could cause suffering to His followers in order to ‘measure’ the degree of their religiosity and loyalty to Him. In line with the belief that this victimisation was part of *Allah*’s plan, participants felt confident that He would ‘reward’ them in the afterlife for not giving up their Muslim identity despite the abuse that they suffered in the present life. This contributes to the sense of resilience that some victims of Islamophobia feel in light of the ‘rewards’ that they will receive in *jannah* (paradise).

> *If I was to be stabbed or have stones thrown at me for the sake of my religion I would feel proud because Allah is testing me. This person is just the means.*
>
> Faridah, 36 years old

> *Everything that is going to happen to me is known to Allah. He has planned it for me so I trust Allah that everything is within His plan. Once there was a man on a bike, I was walking on the street [in Leicester] and he ran into me on purpose. He could have gone round me but he didn’t. He ran into me and just shouted ‘Look where you’re going’. I was bruised for days. I think of this sort of thing as suffering for the sake of religion.*
>
> Rahimah, 26 years old

This is part and parcel of being a Muslim. The first thing I learned when I became a Muslim is that there are many hardships. This is a test. We believe that there is a better life afterwards.

Zoe, 27 years old

We know that any abuse we get, we get it just because we practise our religion properly. We believe in the afterlife, we know that there will be rewards for us in jannah [paradise]. This is a small sacrifice that we have to go through. It is a means for us to gain something better in the hereafter.

Focus group participant

6.4.2 Vulnerability and fear

Experiences of Islamophobic victimisation increased feelings of insecurity, vulnerability and anxiety amongst participants, particularly for repeat victims. Bowling (2009) states that repeated or persistent victimisation can undermine the security of actual and potential victims, and induce fear and anxiety. The distressing nature of Islamophobic victimisation coupled with the frequency with which these acts were committed, had created high levels of fear amongst participants. In line with the apparent exclusionary intent and impact of this victimisation, participants felt extremely wary in public with a great sense of danger, which is 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

I do feel fear depending on where I am. Here [in Leicester] I know who my enemies are, I know where they are, so it's easier. If I were to go somewhere else I'll have more fear because I don't know that area. For example, when I go up North I know there's a lot more racism.

Rahimah, 44 years old

A couple of participants felt 'lucky' because, unlike other Muslim sisters who had suffered serious incidents of physical abuse, they had only experienced 'low-level' manifestations of Islamophobia such as name-calling in public. Nevertheless, they knew that they themselves were equally vulnerable to physical abuse and as a result they were fearful for their safety in public.

Abdulilah I've been lucky because I haven't been physically attacked yet.

Omera, 22 years old

I've been very lucky in that my experiences have only been name-calling.

Halimah, 19 years old

My friend went out in her niqab [in Barcelona] and a man let his dogs off the lead and the dogs were running after her. She nearly got bitten. She said it was a very horrible experience. I'm really shocked and hurt a sister had to suffer like that. They treat us worse than animals. Being chased by dogs, you feel you are going to die. She was running for her life. I'm fortunately that I haven't had anything physical but I feel for her as I think I could be the next person.

Talibah, 33 years old

The threat of abuse has long-lasting effects for 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. Such feelings of fear and anxiety sometimes manifested in physical symptoms including headaches and migraines, back pain and fatigue. Participants also emphasised that they never felt safe in public and therefore they always had to keep their guard up and be vigilant.

> *I'm always cautious of what is happening around to make sure that I'm safe.*
>
> Nadia, 29 years old

> *I've always been vigilant because I know there's a lot of people who are racist and don't like the veil even in Leicester.*
>
> Sarah, 31 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

This sense of constant fearfulness was intensified by the persistent circulation of (sometimes inaccurate) information about veiled Muslim women being attacked in Leicester. Although the purpose of such text messages, Facebook posts or tweets was to minimise the incidence of Islamophobic victimisation through public awareness, yet it often had the result of increasing feelings of fear amongst Muslims and veiled Muslim women in particular.

We hear stories and we get even more scared. Sometimes they say 'Don't go into town [Leicester city centre], they're pulling Muslim women's veils off' but is it a rumour going on or what? Obviously I don't know because I don't go to town very often.

People will say 'Make sure you're home before seven o'clock at night, don't go out on your own, if you do go out, go out with a male person'. It can create a siege mentality. It can put people's guards up.

Focus group participants

Clearly, participants feared for their safety; however, this sense of vulnerability depended upon notions of space and place. For example, participants felt safer in spaces and places where the Muslim public presence was well-established by virtue of 'safety in numbers'. By contrast, in spaces and places where the Muslim population was rather small, the sense of vulnerability as well as the risk of attack was perceived to be significantly higher. Hindelang (2009) observes that the ability of individuals to isolate themselves from people with offender characteristics affects the probability of victimisation. Mythen *et al*. (2009) found that the fear of abuse restricted Muslims' freedom of movement in public, use of community facilities and visits to 'hostile' areas. Similarly, Tarlo (2007) highlights the reluctance of both *hijab* and *niqab* wearers to visit areas in London where they will be in a sartorial minority. Essentially, participants' fear increased when visiting 'hostile' or unknown areas, and decreased in more familiar or Muslim-friendly areas.

This discussion demonstrates 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. Unarguably, this limits the behavioural options and life choices of individuals as it determines the area of residence, their vocational pursuits and leisure activities, their mode

of transport, and even their access to educational opportunities[37]. Ultimately, this reality has resulted in segregation in housing, transportation, education, employment and leisure activities. However, as Perry and Alvi (2012) point out, this is not a voluntary choice; rather, it is the 'safe' choice. They explain 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 (Perry and Alvi, 2012). 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. Ultimately, the fear of attack reinforces these emotional and geographical boundaries whilst promoting patterns of segregation between 'us' and 'them'. Correspondingly, the 'us versus them' mentality is apparent in the following comments:

> *From the point of our [Muslim] community, there is suspicion towards non-Muslims. There's no doubt about it.*
>
> *We don't feel safe enough to go out there and integrate. We feel that everyone is the enemy apart from the Muslims.*
>
> Focus group participants

Some participants were conscious of the fact that the threat of Islamophobic victimisation was always present, regardless of their location. Indeed, even in areas with a high Muslim population such as the area of Highfields in Leicester, participants still experienced incidents of abuse, violence and intimidation and as a result their sense of vulnerability was still significant – though not as high as it would be in a non-Muslim area. As such, participants were often reluctant to leave the house even in their 'comfort zone' because of fear of being attacked particularly on the street, in parks, in shops and on public transport in the local community. Several participants reported feeling afraid of stepping out of their homes, certainly on foot. To avoid future

[37] For example, some participants were convinced that they would face discrimination at university and this prevented them from pursuing a higher education degree.

attacks, they negotiated their safety in public through avoiding walking on the street and using public transport as little as possible.

> *I wouldn't take buses that go to Braunstone, Beaumont Leys, Saffron Lane [traditionally white areas in Leicester].*
>
> Rahimah, 44 years old

> *I used to take the bus to go to college but I felt everybody was staring at me so I decided not to use the bus for a while. I just walk to college.*
>
> Halimah, 19 years old

> *I can't drive so I have to take the bus. I don't normally travel on the bus upstairs, I always go downstairs so that I can get off at any time. I always travel on the lower deck of the bus but on one occasion I did have to go upstairs. There were about five young lads at the back of the bus and I was sitting on my own. One of them came and sat next to me thinking it was a laugh to sit next to me. They didn't do anything or say anything but just the close proximity was enough to make me feel under threat. I got off at the next stop even though it was four stops away from where I wanted to get off.*
>
> Nimah, 28 years old

Some participants revealed that they learnt to drive and bought a car or hired a taxi so that they did not have to walk on the street or use public transport. But there is no indication from the data that those who used a car and those who had made more restrictions on their lives were less likely to be victims of Islamophobia.

> *I walk or take the bus very rarely because I don't feel safe. Even in this community [Highfields, Leicester] I don't feel too secure in public transport.*
>
> Zafirah, 33 years old

Even if it is little distance, like you walked from the University to here [participant's house], I avoid walking, I prefer taking the car. I try to use the car to protect myself.

Nisha, 28 years old

Indeed, a key finding was that participants faced hostility and abuse when driving. For example, other drivers or people walking on the street had shouted:

How can you see with that thing on?

Rasheeda, 41 years old

Who gives you permission to drive?

Shafia, 31 years old

If you can't see why do you drive?

Nazia, 50 years old

Clearly, some participants had altered their lifestyle with the aim to reduce the risk of future attacks. They mentioned 'no-go areas' where they would face an increased risk of abuse whilst others restricted their public travel to a minimum. Participants who lived in Muslim-dominated areas in Leicester revealed that they very rarely ventured outside of their local community and as such they (and occasionally their families) had imposed very strict curfews upon them. In this sense, they felt sheltered from hostility that they would experience had they left the local community and even the house. Moreover, several participants revealed that they would not normally leave their house unless they had to do 'emergency' shopping or to collect their children from school. Those with young school children felt extremely unsafe taking them to and from school. This resulted in some participants choosing to home-school their children.

I home-school my kids so that I don't need to leave the house.

Rafia, 45 years old

I was in town [Leicester city centre] and a white man came up to me and threatened me with a knife. After this incident I restricted myself from going out. I've become more reserved and tend to stay in the house more whereas before I would go out a lot.

Wadiah, 40 years old

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 (2010a) observes that veiled Muslim women often try to become less 'visible' and as such less vulnerable by taking the veil off. In this sense, experiences of previous victimisation lead to strategies of identity management, often geared toward the need to publicly validate the self as 'safe' (Mythen *et al*., 2009). Throughout interviews and focus group discussions, participants reported downplaying their 'Muslimness' through reluctantly removing their veils, speaking in English (preferably with a British accent to demonstrate their 'Britishness') and reducing the use of Urdu in all or certain public places. In this context, veiled Muslim women appear to manage impressions of their Muslim identity in public mainly through concealment with the aim to reduce the risk of future abuse (Ghumman and Ryan, 2013).

I never take off the hijab and the jilbab but the niqab I do take it off. I don't want to be an outcast everywhere I go. I want to belong somewhere. All my [Muslim] family is quite modern, very Westernised. In life we have rights but we also need to compromise. When you come to my age, when you have children, you will learn to compromise.

Hadiqa, 40 years old

I try to speak loud enough so that people understand that there is an English speaking person behind the veil. As soon as they hear that I speak fluent English it usually changes people's perceptions. I find that they don't carry on being horrible because I've showed them that I'm a normal person. Maybe I dress differently but I am one of them.

I keep my English name to avoid prejudice. Having a Muslim name does not say who you are. It's just a name at the end of the day.

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

Interestingly, focus groups participants shared ideas on how to stay safe including wearing colourful *jilbabs*, *hijabs* and *niqabs* instead of black ones. Given that the veil can be worn in a variety of colours and styles, it is possible that certain combinations may be perceived as less 'extreme' forms of veiling.

I try to dress myself differently. What I tend to do is if I am in an area which is predominantly Muslim, I'm comfortable wearing my black cloaks so everything is black but if I go to a non-Muslim area, I have a range of different colour cloaks and cloak sizes. I wear different colours and sizes to non-Muslim people so I don't seem very black in the face.

I wrap it in a different way, for example, taking the scarf and wrapping it over my face or maybe showing my nose, something like that, you know, trying different ways of doing it. Sometimes I get a coloured niqab rather than a black one. Black is usually seen as more hostile whereas if it is a pink or a blue one it looks more friendly so people might not realise that I'm veiled.

Focus group participants

However, some participants took the extra step in veiling by covering their eyes and wearing gloves in order to hide their 'Britishness'. This was a particularly useful tool for white British converts to Islam who felt vulnerable on the basis of being seen as 'traitors', at least in the eyes of their abusers.

> *I've recently started covering my eyes as well. Because I have blue eyes people know straight away that I'm a revert so they will treat me worse. They think that I betrayed them by becoming a Muslim. I feel more confident actually covering my eyes. I also wear gloves to avoid showing the colour of my skin.*
>
> Aleena, 28 years old

This comment demonstrates that experiences of Islamophobic victimisation impact upon the way in which women express their 'Muslimness' particularly in relation to their outward displays of faith, body presentation and dress (Mythen *et al*., 2009). Also, defensive tactics included efforts to appear less desirable as a victim such as hiding their Muslim identity. As such, a couple of participants concealed their adherence to Islam by removing their veils and wearing Western clothes in specific or all public places.

> *In Islam you have to look after yourself and if you are going to be in danger, you must take it off. I didn't want to take it off but I have to think of my children now.*
>
> Tashia, 45 years old

Taking the veil off seemed to be a promising strategy for helping participants to erase the perceived source of their vulnerability and as a result reduce the risk of future attacks. At the same time though, there was a price to pay, namely, the disapproval of other practising Muslims and in some cases arguments with friends and family, who criticised them for not being strong enough to keep the veil on. Participants themselves often felt that they had committed a sin by taking the veil off. Consequently, this increased participants' feelings of isolation, self-blame and guilt.

Since I took it off, it feels like I've committed a really big sin. I was fighting with my own demons. I should have fought back. I shouldn't have removed it.

Tashia, 45 years old

There are many occasions I do take it off but I feel that the local community, because they know me for so many years with the veil, they think 'Oh, why is she not wearing it?' So for that reason if I go somewhere where there are people from our [Muslim] community I will not take it off.

Mahmooda, 27 years old

When I took it off, the ladies who wore niqabs were quite horrible to me. They judged me for taking it off. They said 'Oh, that's come off, so does that mean that everything else is coming off?' They said that in a very nasty way and I thought 'Is that what Islam teaches you?'

Yara, 26 years old

Furthermore, defensive tactics included efforts to appear more formidable such as walking with a male companion. In this regard, acquiring strategies of resilience are presented as a means of preventing future victimisation. 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 illustrate, 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. However, others felt confident enough to leave the house on their own.

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.

I don't always go out with someone else. I'm very brave. I can't keep waiting for everybody. I have things to do but I know sisters who wouldn't go out on their own.

Focus group participants

At the same time though, not every participant had a male companion. For example, Haleemah felt extremely vulnerable as a single Muslim woman. She explained that wearing the veil seemed to be an obstacle for finding a (Muslim) husband as many prospective partners told her that she would have to take the veil off if she wanted to get married. This infers that the wearing of the veil is sometimes perceived as an 'extreme' form of practising Islam for 'Westernised' Muslims.

I'm more vulnerable because I don't have a male partner walking along with me. Single women like me, we don't have men accompanying us even to the local shops. Most of the time, there are women who are wearing veils but they have their husbands who are accompanying them so other people will not give them any abuse.

Haleemah, 32 years old

Furthermore, participants made reference 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 the public space or by reducing the time spent in public places, participants reduced the probability of

Islamophobic victimisation. Accordingly, participants spoke of feeling safe by confining themselves to their home as much as possible, as this provided them with immutability from being attacked in public. Many participants explained 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 (Magne, 2003).[38] From this perspective, the tangible fear of being assaulted limits pivotal aspects of identity building such as visiting friends, going to university and attending the mosque (Mythen *et al*., 2009). As such, the threat of violence deprives actual and potential victims of freedom of movement and engagement out of their safe spaces and places (Perry, 2005).

In light of this, a couple of participants reported feeling like 'prisoners in their own home'. Although the experience and fear of victimisation had led those 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 abuse. Seen in this context, negotiations of personal safety can create a sense of imprisonment on the basis that they restrict veiled Muslim women's participation in society, despite decreasing exposure to Islamophobic victimisation in public. For those veiled Muslim women who are victims of domestic violence they are likely to feel that nowhere is safe for them.

> *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

[38] However, some participants suffered from damage to their property such as windows smashing, persistent door-knocking, egg-throwing and graffiti, and this had a cumulative effect upon themselves and their families. Attacks on property violate the security of the place where an individual is considered safest (Bowling, 2009). In this regard, the physical fabric of a house provides only an illusion of defence against attacks (Bowling, 2009).

I got chased by a couple of lads [in Yorkshire]. They were calling me names as I walked past them. I carried on walking, they started chasing me so I started running and they ran behind me. I went into a shop but luckily they didn't follow me into the shop. Now I have agoraphobia. I'm afraid to go out. I left my job. I'm stuck at home really.

Asima, 42 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

6.4.3 Implications for the family

Experiences of Islamophobic victimisation coupled with the potential for future attacks affected and sometimes seriously damaged the quality of life of participants and their families. On many occasions, participants' children were affected by this victimisation, especially since they were witnesses of such incidents. For young children, witnessing their mother being abused was confusing and extremely upsetting. For Muslim girls in particular, such experiences discouraged them from deciding to wear the veil.

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

The incident at Sainsbury's [a white English man shouted 'Get the fuck out of my country'], my children witnessed it and my younger daughter was very upset because she couldn't understand why it happened. She was like 'Why is he saying that mummy? We are British, aren't we?'

Aisha, 34 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 impact of Islamophobic victimisation was 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 regard, both the experience and threat of Islamophobic attack in public places created a fear of leaving the house for victims and their families. For many participants, the threat of ongoing or future attacks had resulted in them feeling compelled to make quite significant changes to their lifestyle patterns in order to protect themselves and their children; changes which almost inevitably compounded their sense of social isolation and withdrawal from their local community. At the same time, there were pressures upon participants from other family members to conform to and perform ascendant notions of 'safeness', including taking the veil off in specific or all public places and avoiding going out unless accompanied by a male relative.

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

When the last incident happened [a man ripped her veil off in Leicester city centre] my dad said 'Don't you think you should remove it?' My husband is very supportive of my veil but my dad is very protective of me and he says that 'If you're going to put yourself into a situation where you're wearing the veil and it's going to make you vulnerable why are you doing it?'

Iman, 37 years old

Participants emphasised the negative effects of this victimisation upon the male members of their family such as their father, brothers, husband and sons who felt inclined to protect them. Participants also discussed the risk of radicalisation particularly amongst young Muslim men who often grow 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

6.4.4 Implications for wider communities

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. This shows that Islamophobic victimisation affects not only the individual victim but also the collective victim. Correspondingly, the individual fear and vulnerability discussed above is accompanied by the collective fear and vulnerability of all Muslims, particularly those individuals who have a 'visible' Muslim identity.

Both Iganski (2001) and Perry (2001) point out that hate crimes are 'message crimes' whereby a message of hate, terror and vulnerability is communicated to the victim's broader community. Within this paradigm, 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 both actual and perceived Muslims. 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).

Within the present study, several participants explicitly acknowledged the nature of their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation as 'message crimes'. As such, the 'message' was received loud and clear. Participants

were conscious of the fact that they were liable to abuse 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'. Respectively, 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. In light of the fear and hostility generated by 9/11 and 7/7, the consequential backlash against Muslims worldwide has strengthened the *ummah*, particularly amongst those Muslims living outside the Muslim 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

In this sense Islamophobic victimisation is seen as an attack upon the fabric of the wider Muslim community. Moreover, Islamophobic victimisation also affects British society on the basis that it undermines the quintessential 'British' qualities of tolerance and multiculturalism that this country is proud of.

We live in a democratic society and one of the beauties of British democracy is that people have the right to dress as they see best and this gives them a sense of pride. But when you have these incidents of violence it takes away that sense of tolerance that Britain prides itself on.

Raniyah, 48 years old

6.5 The normative aspect of Islamophobic victimisation

When considering the impact of Islamophobic victimisation upon veiled Muslim women, their families and wider communities, it is necessary to recognise that such incidents are far from being a single, homogenous entity. As our earlier discussion suggested, participants were multiple and repeat victims of both 'visible' and 'invisible' forms of Islamophobic victimisation. Rarely did participants describe Islamophobic victimisation as 'one-off' incidents; rather there was always the sense, the fear, the expectation for another attack. Crucially, recognising Islamophobic victimisation as a process signifies that it is 'part and parcel' of veiled Muslim women's everyday life, and this reinforces the sense of constant risk for actual and potential victims. Within this paradigm, Islamophobia and its attendant forms of abuse, violence and harassment were seen by participants as 'normal' and 'natural'. This discussion highlights the 'ordinariness' of Islamophobic victimisation in terms of how embedded it is in the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women. Essentially, the fact that Islamophobic victimisation was understood as a normative part of the everyday lived experiences of veiled Muslim women also meant that some participants had become 'used to it' and therefore 'immune' to this victimisation. In light of the 'ordinariness' of Islamophobic victimisation, participants reported feeling weak, powerless and defenceless.

If I have to go to town tomorrow I do expect people to give me dirty looks and make nasty comments. I expect it to happen. It really hurts me but what can I do? I've learned to live with it now. It's not affecting us anymore. We've got to that stage that it doesn't matter anymore.

Huda, 27 years old

It's part of life. I know I shouldn't be thinking this way but that is what's happening and there's nothing I could do about it.

Samina, 35 years old

It has become part of our lives and to some extent we have become immune to it. Nobody even talks about it because we're so used to it.

I think when it happens, most of the time I expect it to happen. We face it so many times that we don't pay attention anymore. It doesn't really affect us because it is something we just learned to live with.

Focus group participants

As suggested in the comments above, Islamophobic victimisation was anticipated by participants to the extent that they had become 'immune' to it. This notion of immutability was coupled with a sense of helplessness on the part of participants. The majority felt that nothing could be done about it and therefore they would have to simply accept it and 'get on with things'. From this perspective, the inevitability of Islamophobic victimisation is tied with the passivity of victims; a notion of self-fulfilling prophesy (as the next chapter examines in more detail when discussing the responses of participants to this victimisation). As such, there was a sense of fatalism in the general acceptance of the permanence of targeted violence due to the visibility of their Muslim identity. This also infers a sense of resignation on the part of victims as it signifies the 'taken-for-grantedness' of everyday harassment and abuse (Perry and Alvi, 2012). In view of these points, I asked participants

whether they were aware of the extent of anti-Muslim hostility that they would suffer before they decided to wear the veil. The following comments show that participants were conscious of the risks involved with wearing the veil and had accepted the maligning of Islam and Muslims as the norm even before deciding to wear it.

> *[Irene: Did anyone tell you beforehand that there is so much hostility if you wear it?] You are naturally aware of this. When you decide to put it on you are already aware of what is going to come with it.*
>
> Amtullah, 24 years old

> *I have had incidents since I put on the veil but I knew that this would happen because other sisters who had worn the veil before me had told me about these things.*
>
> Tahirah, 23 years old

For the black and Asian Muslim women who took part in the study, this notion of 'taken-for-grantedness' of everyday harassment and abuse was relevant to past experiences of racist attacks. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, some participants had experienced racism (prior to wearing the veil) within the context of similar incidents of verbal and physical abuse on the basis of their skin colour rather than their religion. These participants compared the impact of being verbally abused as a 'Paki' or 'Black Paki' in the past with the impact of being verbally abused as a 'Muslim terrorist' in the present. For these participants, any one incident of Islamophobic victimisation added to the experiences of racism that their parents or they themselves had suffered whilst growing up in this country. Within this framework, the correspondence of the individual and the collective experience renders Islamophobic victimisation normative. It happened to their parents and now it happens to them, and therefore it is a 'normal' aspect of their lives (Perry and Alvi, 2012).

My parents were very strong. They just got on with life as if it was just normal and we learned 'just deal with it'.

I grew up in a white area in London knowing I'm different and compromising what I could and couldn't do. So when I put on the veil and people started making comments I knew how to cope with it. It makes no difference to me because I grew up looking behind my back. We are in England. We have to live with it.

Focus group participants

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has offered an insight into the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia in public places in Leicester and elsewhere. It illustrated the seriousness of Islamophobic victimisation by outlining its nature and impact as experienced by veiled Muslim women themselves. The preceding discussion has shown that the perpetrators reveal their motivation through the language that they use when verbally abusing their victims. In this regard, offenders commonly express their Islamophobic sentiments by way of an insult linking the victim to terrorism although at times it is not clear whether the attacks are motivated by Islamophobia, sexism, misogyny, racism, xenophobic sentiments or indeed a combination of these factors. However, according to participants' perceptions, the visibility of their veil is pivotal to these attacks whilst perceived 'weaknesses' such as physical disabilities, language difficulties, age, physical shape and size increase the risk of being attacked. Having explored the ways and the frequency with which Islamophobia manifests itself in public, the chapter then outlined the consequences of this problem for veiled Muslim women, their families, and wider Muslim communities. Participants described the emotional, psychological and behavioural effects of this victimisation which in many cases had severe implications for their emotional, psychological and physical well-being. The next chapter examines victims' coping mechanisms and criminal justice responses to this victimisation.

Chapter Seven
Coping Mechanisms

7.1 Introduction

The research findings discussed so far have focused predominantly upon the nature and impact of Islamophobic victimisation upon veiled Muslim women, their families and wider Muslim communities. As we saw in the previous chapter, understanding Islamophobic victimisation as an ongoing pattern of harassment, abuse and violence rather than as isolated, one-off incidents, highlights that veiled Muslim women are locked in a circle of repeat and multiple victimisation. From this perspective, there are unique emotional, psychological and behavioural consequences for actual and potential victims. Everyday experiences of both explicit and subtle manifestations of Islamophobia produce, *inter alia*, feelings of inferiority, loss of confidence and self-esteem, depression, flashbacks, guilt and self-blame. However, the extent to which these effects determine veiled Muslim women's lived experiences arises out of a complex interaction between the nature and impact of this victimisation, victims' coping mechanisms as well as the amount of support that they receive. Consequently, understanding their coping strategies and assessing the effectiveness of available support services is important in order to determine how to assist veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia.

In light of this, the analysis now turns to consider the ways in which participants coped with Islamophobic victimisation. Correspondingly, there are two main, yet contrasting, potential responses – passivity and resistance. Within this paradigm, some participants chose to ignore the abuse whilst others resisted it through challenging their abusers. Related to the point of passivity, the chapter contends that this victimisation is extensively under-reported and sheds light on the reasons why victims are reluctant to come forward. Moreover, the chapter considers the effectiveness, or otherwise, of available support provisions for victims of Islamophobia, particularly in relation to the treatment of veiled Muslim women by criminal justice agencies. It will be argued that veiled Muslim women not only experience Islamophobic

victimisation due to specific incidents but may also experience secondary victimisation in their interactions with criminal justice agents, such as the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts.

7.2 Coping strategies

7.2.1 Passivity

Throughout the interviews and focus group discussions, it was evident that participants used a variety of coping strategies in order to come to terms with the consequences of Islamophobic victimisation both short-term (for example, at the time it happened) and long-term. Overall there were two main, yet contrasting, potential responses – passivity and resistance. In terms of passivity, participants' common response was to ignore the abuse or pretend it did not happen. In this context, ignoring the abuse was a conscious coping strategy aimed at preventing further violence (Lambert and Githens-Mazer, 2011). By virtue of being physically weaker than their (predominantly) male abusers, participants often chose to 'let it go'. Although they wanted to challenge their abuser's behaviour, participants often decided not to react because of fear of the situation escalating. From this perspective, 'turning a blind eye' was seen as the least inflammatory method of dealing with this victimisation. The fear of escalating violence prevented participants from challenging their abusers, as the quotations below illustrate.

> *I try not to notice it. I try not to look at other people's reactions. I just keep my head down. That's what most of us tend to do.*
>
> Shagufta, 52 years old

> *I had a youngster saying 'Get away from here'. I said 'Excuse me, was that directed at me?' and he said 'Yeah, what are you going to do? I'll beat you up'.*
>
> Alia, 34 years old

> *I can't do anything against a man that's why I never answer back. If I answer back he might become violent towards me so I walk away and try to forget about it.*
>
> Farhat, 21 years old

Several participants pointed out that this sense of passivity was an example of 'classic immigrant thinking' to keep quiet and ignore the insults. This line of thinking socialises immigrant women to accept victimisation without challenging it and whilst this may be common for first generation immigrant women I found it surprising that second or third generation British Muslim women would think and act in a similar fashion. Unfortunately, this notion of (perceived) passivity serves to confirm popular misconceptions that veiled Muslim women are oppressed, timid and subjugated. As we saw in Chapter Three, the stereotypical image of women in Islam includes a sense of passivity, weakness, disadvantage and powerlessness, which marks veiled Muslim women as 'soft' and 'convenient' targets to attack.

By virtue of the fact that the wearing of the veil is seen as a symbol of Muslim women's inferiority, participants who did not challenge their abusers were likely to fit this stereotype, at least in the minds of the perpetrators. This ties in with the suggestions of Allen *et al.* (2013) who found that Muslim women felt that they were 'easy' targets because of failing to confront their abusers (in addition to the visibility of their Muslim identity). Seen in this light, veiled Muslim women are typically 'quiet' and do not normally engage in confrontation and public arguments. When this lack of (re)action is combined with the more visually recognisable aspects of being a Muslim woman (for example, through veiling) then veiled Muslim women become 'ideal' targets for those seeking to attack a symbol of Islam (Allen *et al*., 2013).

However, it is important to recognise that the interpretation of this victimisation as 'normal' was relevant to participants' responses to it, especially in the context of passivity. As we saw in Chapter Six, for the majority of participants the accumulation of experiences of Islamophobic victimisation had become a backdrop for everyday life. Such experiences were perceived as 'part and parcel' of veiled Muslim women's lives and therefore as acceptable, normal attitudes rather than as examples of

Islamophobic victimisation. Consequently, the commonality of this form of victimisation had prompted several participants to either ignore it or dismiss it as 'not serious'. Similarly, Mythen *et al*. (2009) found that young Muslims predominantly responded to incidents of Islamophobic victimisation with a sense of passivity and resignation. Within this framework, ignoring the abuse or dismissing it as 'not serious' was an important factor in not wanting to see themselves or be defined by others as 'victims' (Mythen *et al*., 2009). As Dunn (2007) points out, the word 'victim' is perceived to have negative connotations of weakness and disadvantage with which some people do not want to be associated. This is crucial in downplaying and, at times, denying Islamophobic victimisation as a means of coping with its impact.

> *I just brush it off my shoulders. What else can I do? At the time it hits me but then I forget about it because it has become an everyday type of thing.*
>
> Yara, 26 years old

> *I've never had anyone come to me and say that they've been attacked. Sisters don't really talk about it.*
>
> Samina, 35 years old

As is evident from the quotations given above, Islamophobic victimisation was not understood as a 'problem' which needed to be addressed; as a result, it was not discussed enough amongst veiled Muslim women in the local Muslim community (a point which is explored more fully in due course). Another common mechanism of minimising manifestations of Islamophobia included attempts on the part of victims to justify their abusers' behaviour. For example, participants stated that individual perpetrators were not to blame. Rather, the 'real' culprits were the media, politicians and the government on the basis that they were promoting Islamophobia. In this thinking, Muslims themselves were also seen as responsible for promoting a negative image of Islam in the West. Clearly, such justifications reduce the attributed responsibility of the perpetrator's behaviour and the necessity for victims to react.

My background is Politics so I know that the media reflect government policies. I know that the government is not doing enough to dispel Islamophobia. There is an element of Islamophobia within the government which obviously the media have taken on board. When racism is institutionalised it is going to feed through down to the public.

Mahmooda, 27 years old

I can't blame them because it's not their fault really. They have been brainwashed by the media. The media gives the message that women in niqab are not integrating into society, and with the politicians making comments such as those [Straw's comments that the veil is a visible sign of separation and of difference], it's very easy for people to be Islamophobic.

Focus group participant

I actually feel sorry for them. It's not good to be the oppressed but it's not good to be the oppressor either. It's worse to be the oppressor. I feel sympathy for the oppressor because ultimately the oppressor is oppressing themselves.

Lubna, 40 years old

Muslims are guilty of offering a great disservice to Islam and the teachings of Islam. It doesn't help when Muslims do terrorist attacks in the name of Islam. Also these demonstrations [anti-war protests and marches in English towns] and the poppy burning [on Remembrance Day] that happened recently are not helping. There is already an element of Islamophobia in this country and we are only igniting it by doing these things.

Shareefa, 23 years old

As these quotations illustrate, individual Islamophobic behaviour was often justified because the media, politicians and the government but also Muslim themselves were often regarded as responsible for implicitly or explicitly promoting Islamophobia. By virtue of the fact that their abusers were not to blame, participants made '*salats*' (praying five times a day) and '*duas*' (certain things to say during prayer) to the Muslim God in order to forgive their abusers and show them the 'right path'. This notion of the 'right path', which participants referred to as '*hidda*', entailed that the perpetrators repented for their sins and converted to Islam, whilst those who were already Muslim would need to practise the 'true' Islam, in line with the *Quranic* teachings. The following quotations are just some of the many examples from the interviews and focus group discussions that help to illustrate this point.

> *I pray to Allah 'Give them hidda'. Hidda means the right path. On the Day of Judgment that person that abused me will repent and become a Muslim. Then he is my Muslim brother. I can't curse on him.*
>
> Karima, 36 years old

> *In situations where I've been abused I ask Allah to guide them and I pray for them that He forgives them.*

> *In his day and age, when Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used to get mocked he was really patient. He used to pray to Allah to either show them [his abusers] the right path or forgive their sins. I want to follow his steps.*
>
> Focus group participants

Furthermore, several participants minimised their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation through a comparison with how much worse it is for Muslims in war-torn countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq. As such, participants understood their individual experiences as part of a wider reality for Muslims. From this perspective, individual experiences of Islamophobic victimisation are firmly indexed to the suffering of Muslims in the UK and

through reference to the *ummah* (the worldwide community of Muslim believers) the suffering of Muslims worldwide (Mythen *et al*., 2009). This line of thinking allows for micro-individual experiences of Islamophobic abuse to be compared to macro-level experiences of victimisation through the notion of *ummah*. Significantly, through comparing their experiences with something 'worse', such as being raped by American soldiers in Afghanistan, participants felt less threatened and more able to go about their daily lives in the UK. Moreover, and to repeat an earlier point, by minimising personal experiences of Islamophobic victimisation, participants felt that they did not have to act on it. Naureen's comment is illustrative:

> *I think about bigger things and then I forget about my personal experiences. There are Muslims all over the world who are dealing with much-much worse. We are not dealing with that much compared to what other Muslims are dealing with and this puts things into perspective for me. There are sisters in Afghanistan who are being raped by American soldiers just because they are Muslim.*
>
> Naureen, 38 years old

Based on the above discussions, it is clear that some participants minimised or dismissed their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation because of fear of escalating violence, the commonality of this abuse, justifications of individual Islamophobic behaviour and last but not least, by comparing their personal experiences with the levels of abuse and hostility that Muslims face in war-torn countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq. From this perspective, participants felt that ignoring the abuse was the best way to deal with manifestations of Islamophobia in public. At the same time though, it is important to recognise that a direct and confrontational response would be inappropriate for followers of Islam. From a religious perspective, participants were not permitted to attack their abusers and therefore behaving appropriately in Islam entailed ignoring the abuse. Indeed, participants stated that it was necessary to remain calm in the face of provocation by insults and harassment on the basis that any negative reaction would damage the image

of Islam and disgrace Muslims as a group, especially in the current climate of Islamophobia. Bullock (2011) points out that the social and political context affects Muslim women's sense of self and how they choose to behave as Muslims in the public eye. Accordingly, participants in Hannan's (2011) study reported that because they were identifiable as 'Muslim women' (since they wore the *jilbab*, *hijab* or *niqab*) it was important for them to behave in the best way possible so that people's impression of Islam was positive, particularly post 9/11.

Significantly, the veil does not reflect the identity of its wearer since one cannot see the woman behind the veil; rather, it reflects the religion of Islam. This means that when someone attacks a veiled Muslim woman, they are not only attacking the woman herself, they are also attacking *the* symbol of Islam in the West; that is, the Muslim veil and by implication Islam itself. By the same token, when the veiled Muslim woman responds to her abuser it is likely to be understood as 'how all Muslims behave' rather than as the response of the individual victim. This line of argument demonstrates that the veil and the behaviour of the woman who wears it represent Islam, for both the victim and the perpetrator. As the following quotations demonstrate, by dismissing the abuse participants felt that they succeeded in promoting a positive image of Islam.

> *I never answer back because I don't want to show a negative image of Islam. Someone can abuse me but I will still be nice to them. Islam teaches us to be tolerant towards people. We are not even allowed to hurt animals, let alone people, whether they are Muslim or not.*
>
> *I want people to have a positive image of Islam. There is a beautiful Quranic verse saying 'Wherever you see evil, repel it with goodness, with kindness'. It's not an eye for an eye, sometimes it is goodness and kindness that fight evil so as Muslims we must take the higher moral ground.*
>
> Focus group participants

I want to practise the teachings of the holy Prophet Mohammed, that's why I don't want to answer back. I'll tell you a story from the times of the Prophet. There was an elderly lady that didn't like the Prophet and every time he would walk past her house she would throw thorns in front of him and shout abuse. Every day he would walk past and then one day she didn't throw those thorns and so he thought 'Oh, what's the matter?' and she was ill so he went to visit her and then she said 'Oh, why have you come to visit me?' and he goes 'Well, you are my neighbour and you are not well so I thought I should come and visit you' so he overcame her with kindness.

Tahmina, 63 years old

Evidently, participants felt that it was their religious duty and obligation as 'good' Muslims to restrain themselves from responding to any verbal and even physical abuse. Ideally, they should walk away and clearly this is what the majority of participants chose to do. Cole and Ahmadi (2003) assert that cultural and religious expectations reinforce this dichotomous interpretation, 'bad' versus 'good' Muslims. Within this paradigm, patience is believed to be an important part of the character of a 'good' Muslim woman, who is also pious enough to wear the veil. At the same time, the wearing of the veil encourages women to align their behaviour with their religious values (Droogsma, 2007).

Indeed, we saw in Chapter Five that some participants decided to wear the veil for the purpose of modesty, where modesty signifies modest dress and humble behaviour. From this perspective, the practice of veiling emerges as a component of modesty, which presumes a more holistic pursuit toward virtuous human behaviour (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003). Droogsma (2007) refers to the *hijab* as a 'behaviour check' because it serves as a reminder to the women who wear it to guard their behaviour so that their lifestyle pleases *Allah*. For participants in this study, being a 'good' Muslim woman (and thus ignoring the abuse) served as a means to strengthen their relationship with *Allah* whereas retaliation would disrupt notions of religious piety and humble

behaviour. For Sahar, deciding to take the veil off was related to her aggressive behaviour which was not in line with the *Quranic* teachings.

> *Niqab is something you put on when you want to become a better person. It's part of the package. I was optimistic. I believed that people were inherently good when I was wearing it. When I lost this optimistic view of people and became aggressive, I realised it was time to take it off.*
>
> Sahar, 47 years old

7.2.2 Resistance

In contrast to the vast majority of participants who routinely ignored, minimised or dismissed their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation, others demonstrated 'agency' in terms of how they responded to such incidents. By agency I am referring to participants' attempts to challenge or retaliate against their abusers. By virtue of reacting either positively or negatively (rather than dismissing it), participants managed to break stereotypes that portray veiled Muslim women as docile, oppressed, weak and as having limited English speaking ability.

Some participants tried to educate their abusers about Islam, Muslims and the veil. For these participants, experiences of Islamophobic victimisation had generated the desire to challenge ignorance and misunderstandings about Islam and Muslims through 'social tuition'. Similarly, participants in Mythen *et al*.'s (2009) study expressed their desire to subvert the negative phenomenon of anti-Muslim hostility (which they believed to result from public misconceptions about Islam and Muslims) through engaging in a positive exercise of social tuition in Islamic religion, culture, history and politics. This can be viewed as a bridge to build relationships between 'us' and 'them', and enhance understanding about Muslims through dialogue (Syed and Pio, 2010). Indeed, participants in this study reported that this could be achieved through the notion of '*dawah*', which means 'to invite to Islam' or 'to offer to share' the faith of Islam. Significantly, '*dawah*' by both words and actions were used by Prophet Muhammad when delivering the message of Islam. Apparently, this is a very important part of being a 'good'

Muslim. Correspondingly, '*dawah*' felt almost as a religious duty that participants had to fulfil. Anisa's response indicates the ways in which veiled Muslim women redefine the veil with meanings that are true to their own experiences.

> *Some people say to me 'Why is it that you can see my face but I can't see yours?' and I say to them 'Why are you wearing a black shirt and I am wearing a white one? Why are you wearing high heels and I am wearing flat shoes?' Because it is a choice. In Islam we call it dawah like education, guidance so by me saying to them in a nice way, 'I am not different than you' I am educating them.*
>
> Anisa, 25 years old

Moreover, educating their abusers allowed participants to turn a negative experience into a positive life lesson, especially for the perpetrators. We saw in the previous chapter that many participants interpreted (and to this extent, rationalised) their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation as a 'test' from *Allah* and this had reinforced their determination to continue to wear the veil. Although this rationalisation appeared common, there were times when victimisation experiences were reinterpreted as an educational opportunity to show their abusers the 'true' picture of Islam. With this in mind, Islamophobic experiences were seen as tribulations which were important for strengthening their religious duty to give *dawah*. In light of this, the issue of educating Islamophobic individuals through dialogue was discussed extensively in the context of focus group interviews where participants advised each other on ways to achieve this. The following comments illustrate the sharing of ideas amongst focus group participants in terms of turning this victimisation into a positive experience.

> *Participant A: Rather than being horrible back I make it a positive thing. I say 'I hope you have a nice day and I will pray for you'.*
>
> *Participant B: That's a good idea. I have to try that one.*
>
> Focus group participants

On the one hand, some participants tried to engage with the people who abused them in order to turn this victimisation into a valuable lesson, particularly for the perpetrators. This highlights that victims often become decision-makers whereby the common assumption that all consequences of victimisation are negative is questioned and attention is paid to the fact that veiled Muslim women are not passive, tolerant victims; rather, they make choices and act. Needless to say, this does not mean that Islamophobic victimisation is desirable; only that it can be transformed into a positive experience. Unarguably, educating their abusers portrays veiled Muslim women as decision-makers and actors/agents rather than as victims. From this perspective, the term 'victim' is rather problematic because it makes invisible the active and positive ways in which veiled Muslim women resist, cope and survive victimisation (see also Spalek, 2006; Kelly, 1987).

On the other hand, several participants reported that trying to engage in conversation with their abusers in order to educate them was a fairly futile exercise. From this perspective, offering *dawah* to perpetrators was seen as a 'lost cause' and a 'waste of time'. Similarly, some participants in Mythen *et al.*'s (2009) study rejected the idea (or religious obligation) of having an educative role, particularly when confronted by individuals with monolithic views of Islam. Moreover, several participants in the present study stated that it was un-Islamic to engage with non-Muslims in general and with non-*Mahram* (marriageable) men in particular even if it was for the purposes of educating them about Islam. One of these participants, Mona, who followed a very strict interpretation of the *Quran* regarding the role of women in Islam argued that any form of giving *dawah* was exclusively a male task. Consequently, she refused to engage in any conversation with men, especially non-*Mahram* men. This is in line with the assertion presented in Chapter Five that the wearing of the veil imposes certain restrictions upon the woman including avoiding contact with non-*Mahram* men.

Islam teaches us that women should stay at home and avoid any contact with men. Some women say to me 'We have to educate them' but no, we leave that to the men. When you wear the veil you have to act in a certain way. In Islam there are certain rulings of how women should act. As women, we are not supposed to speak to men unless we really have to. This is how Allah has said it to us and our Prophet has said 'You protect yourself and the beauty is in your hair, your face, your voice and your eyes as well'.

Mona, 38 years old

However, some participants did not hesitate to stand up to their abusers and retaliate against their behaviour. Contrary to other veiled Muslim women who tried to educate their abusers through dialogue, these participants felt that retaliation was the only way to actually 'teach them a lesson'. In most cases, retaliation took the form of verbal abuse, as the following quotations demonstrate.

I've used the F word so many times like 'What the fuck are you looking at?' To them it's very shocking because it's proper slang language. I know that Islamically it's not acceptable but I'm only human [laughs].

Jabeen, 17 years old

When people stare sometimes I say 'Don't you know it is rude to stare?' [Irene: Are you not afraid that they might react?] No, nobody's really attacked me after I've answered back to them. They are more scared of us than we are scared of them. I think Islamophobia is that fear of Islam more than anything else. They fear that even if we make a comment it might lead to the whole city being blown up.

Zareena, 22 years old

There is this assumption that Muslim women are oppressed so we will not react but I fight my own battles. I do stand up for myself. Once I lifted my veil up and stuck my two fingers up.

Sabirah, 35 years old

As is evident from comments such as these, participants sometimes made a cutting remark or shouted abuse to the perpetrators as a form of retaliation. Moreover, in an eye for an eye mentality, several participants physically defended themselves against their abusers. Although this behaviour may be relatively uncommon for veiled Muslim women, it shows that one should not dichotomise too rigidly between 'victims' and 'offenders' when considering how victims respond to this victimisation (Dignan, 2004). In their aggressive, oppositional or defiant behaviour, these participants responded to perpetrators in a way that is rather unusual for veiled Muslim women who are routinely perceived as weak, submissive, oppressed and powerless. In a similar vein, participants in Lambert and Githens-Mazer's study (2011) stated that they felt compelled to respond directly and sometimes violently towards their attackers. In particular, participants in Lambert and Githens-Mazer's study (2011) reported that they were not confident that the police as well as the government were sufficiently supportive in order to allow them to rely solely on legal responses to the daily intimidation and violence that they faced. As the following quotations indicate, retaliation in the form of physical violence was sometimes perceived to be the only appropriate response.

I was pregnant with my daughter and a woman pushed her trolley in Sainsbury's [in Coventry] towards my belly and that's one incident when I snapped and I hit her. I don't want to act like that because that's not the way we are taught to behave in Islam but sometimes I feel I have to.

Dearbhla, 24 years old

I was in Norway at the airport and my mum and sisters walk really slowly, they take the piss, I am the leader of the group. There was this Jewish man who came up to me. He pushed me and shouted 'I hate Muslims'. I punched him. I am really aggressive. I can really defend myself, you know.

Hakimah, 22 years old

If they spit at me I spit back at them. Spitting is at another level.

Jabeen, 17 years old

Although some participants did not necessarily verbally or physically attack their abusers, they were keen on challenging them in a rather hostile manner, as the following quotations illustrate.

I was in town [Leicester city centre] and a man said to his son 'Look over there, there's a postbox'. I turned round and said 'I thought postboxes were red not black'.

Amaraah, 37 years old

I was in Zara [in London] and a child said to his mum 'Doesn't she look like a ghost?' and she said 'Don't they all look like ghosts?' so I said 'Don't you know ghosts are white not black? I think you look like a ghost because you are white all over'.

Alisha, 44 years old

I was walking in the city centre [in Southampton] and this lady came round and she said to me 'You give me a fright' so I said 'Don't look at me then, look in the other direction'.

Sadiyyah, 29 years old

I was coming to Birmingham Airport from Dubai and when I went to the desk the man at the immigration said to me 'Can you speak English?' and I said 'I can speak English better than you'.

Focus group participant

Along similar lines, there were incidents where participants used humour to challenge their abusers, as indicated in the following quotations.

> *When they call me a terrorist I say 'Yeah, I am a terrorist, do you want to see my gun?' and then they realise that I have a sense of humour and they just stare shocked by my response or they just walk away looking silly themselves.*
>
> Nimah, 28 years old

> *Once I was in the underwear department in Marks and Spencer [in Leicester] buying lingerie and some ladies were looking at me from top to bottom so I turned round and said 'I am a Muslim not a nun, I am allowed to wear this, you know' [laughs].*
>
> Johara, 35 years old

Significantly, several participants were keen on challenging people who made negative comments about their physical appearance behind the veil. I found it interesting that some of these participants would normally ignore Islamophobic comments on the basis that they did not regard them as a personal attack; rather, they felt that they were targeted because of their affiliation with Islam. However, when people made negative comments about how they looked behind the veil, several participants were keen on answering back to their abusers because in this case, such comments were perceived as a personal attack rather than as an attack upon Islam. In other words, interpreting such incidents as personal attacks was crucial in motivating participants to challenge the perpetrators.

> *Once somebody came up to me and said 'Have you got a really ugly face?' I said 'No, actually my face looks better than yours, it's too good for you to look at'. Don't give me crap, I'll give you crap.*
>
> Aliyah, 18 years old

I was coming to Leicester from London and this guy goes 'You must be really ugly under there to cover your face' and I said 'Not as ugly as you are, trust me, you should be covering'.

Roukia, 27 years old

As I walked out of Trinity [shopping centre in Leeds] two lads said to me 'Are you that ugly that you have to cover your face? I said 'Well, if I had a face like yours I would never want to take my veil off'.

Hakimah, 22 years old

When they say I'm ugly, I'm tempted to lift my veil up to show them that actually I'm looking much better than them, you know.

Dearbhla, 24 years old

It appears from the above analysis that not all veiled Muslim women accept Islamophobic victimisation as a normative aspect of their lives. Clearly, some participants were not afraid to confront their abusers, challenge their behaviour and even retaliate, both verbally and physically. From this perspective, retaliation re-equilibrates power as the perpetrator is subjected to the victim's aggressive behaviour whereby the victim becomes the perpetrator. With this in mind, it is important to recognise the capacity for veiled Muslim women to be both victims and perpetrators. This discussion challenges the contrasting roles of perpetrator and victim which have routinely been taken as a 'given', particularly in the context of hate crime (Chakraborti and Garland, 2012). For example, according to Perry's conceptual framework of hate crime, perpetrators and victims are understood in terms of their 'superior' and 'subordinate' identities respectively. However, the findings in this study demonstrate that veiled Muslim women sometimes reject the boundaries between perpetrators and victims, and retaliate against their abusers in order to punish them for their Islamophobic behaviour. This line of argument highlights the close link between victimisation and offending, and the overlapping between the victim and offender populations (Dignan, 2004).

Within the framework of hate crime, the intention of the perpetrator is to intimidate and control veiled Muslim women on the basis that they (the perpetrators) are superior on multiple levels, be it religiously, culturally or racially (Perry, 2001). However, veiled Muslim women may resist the control that their abusers seek to exert by challenging this behaviour. By retaliating, veiled Muslim women send a 'message' to their abusers; that they do not accept this behaviour and that the perpetrator has no right to attack them. It also sends a message to the offender's group; that Islamophobic abuse will not be tolerated in the Muslim community. Resistance strategies in this context convey the message to the perpetrators that victims refuse to accept (or ignore) their abusive behaviour. Interestingly, none of the participants who challenged their abusers were aware of the language of, or debates around, hate crime. They were simply reacting on the basis of how Islamophobic victimisation made them feel. That said, participants who reacted in such a manner stated that this was a good way of 'letting off steam' on the basis that they dealt with the problem there and then. As the quotations below illustrate, reacting in this way meant that participants felt less victimised by the experience because they did not internalise any feelings of anger, sadness, shame or guilt.

> *When they call me things like 'dirty piece of Muslim shit' I do answer back so that they shut up. That's the only way because I've left it behind and then I don't come home and think about it.*
>
> Aafreen, 30 years old

> *I feel really-really good when I give the comments back because it won't get to me then. I need to answer back and then it's done. It's out of my system.*
>
> Hadia, 36 years old

Nevertheless, a consistent theme running through all the focus group discussions was that such actions of retaliation were retrospectively assessed and perceived as 'un-Islamic' by other participants. As the following dialogue illustrates, the issue of dealing with incidents of Islamophobic

victimisation in an aggressive manner was debated in a focus group interview at a mosque.

> *Participant A: Once I was in town [Leicester city centre] and a guy swore at me so I turned back and I told him to 'fuck off'.*
>
> *Participant B: Look, you just give Muslims a bad name by saying bad stuff to them.*
>
> *Participant A: No, we need to teach them we're not stupid.*
>
> *Participant B: You're still giving Islam a bad name because you're being violent towards them. That picture of terrorism and violence in Islam is not going to be separate for them.*
>
> *Participant C: Remember that the whole purpose of the veil is to not attract unwanted attention to yourself so if you're going to say something to somebody you have to try to be as polite as you possibly can.*
>
> Focus group participants

Similar views were put forward in the context of individual interviews with participants who were critical of veiled Muslim women that did not behave in line with the *Quranic* teachings. For these participants, an example of behaving 'inappropriately' in Islam – and as a result bringing shame to the Muslim community – included veiled Muslim women retaliating against their abusers. Accordingly, the following quotations illustrate their 'message' to those veiled Muslim women who fail to behave as 'good' Muslims.

> *If you do wear it, you need to realise that you represent Islam. You can let yourself down but if you let Islam down you hurt all of us. I say 'Be careful of what you do when you have the veil on, be conscious of your actions'.*
>
> Tashia, 45 years old

If you want to do something wrong, fine go ahead, but do not cover yourself Islamically, do not let your religion down, do not show your religion. When I wear the niqab I make sure I represent Islam in the best way I can.

Dahab, 52 years old

The preceding discussion shows that participants' reactions to Islamophobic incidents varied significantly. Some participants never reacted but instead ignored the incident(s), whilst others challenged their abusers by trying to educate them or by retaliating. As such, participants' reactions varied from the passivity of those individuals who ignored the abuse to the aggressive responses of those who refused to tolerate any abuse. These findings lend weight to the view that there are two polar opposite characteristics at each end of a spectrum of potential responses – passivity and resistance. At first sight, ignoring the abuse seems to validate the argument that veiled Muslim women are weak, passive and oppressed, which renders them 'soft' targets, especially in the eyes of the perpetrators. In contrast, the latter behaviour seems to challenge popular stereotypes of veiled Muslim women as docile, submissive and powerless.

However, I would argue that not one of my participants had passively accepted incidents of Islamophobic victimisation. In other words, none of the veiled Muslim women who took part in this study should be perceived as passive, tolerant victims. Rather, deciding to ignore the abuse was a form of resistance in itself. From this perspective, coping through ignoring the abuse can be better understood as a form of agency and a choice not to engage in un-Islamic behaviour or as a safety mechanism for fear of the abuse escalating. Even when apparently acting passively, for example, when ignoring the abuse, veiled Muslim women are actively making choices and decisions, considering what is the best (and safest) way to deal with a specific incident of Islamophobia. This infers that both active and passive forms of resistance are fluid and hence not 'immutable entities'.

7.3 Support mechanisms

7.3.1 Informal support network

Throughout the interviews and focus group discussions, it became evident that participants mainly drew from informal networks of support to cope with Islamophobic victimisation. There was very little formal support, for example, from official organisations such as Victim Support; rather, it was mostly informal support from relatives and friends – people with whom participants had close ties. Similarly, Lambert and Githens-Mazer (2011) found that the majority of the Muslim women who took part in the study did not discuss their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation outside of a close circle of family and friends (and did not report such incidents to the police). Spalek (2006) argues that a supportive social network consisting of family and friends might help individuals to cope with the detrimental effects of crime, especially in the absence of 'official' support from Victim Support, health and welfare organisations. In line with family and friends who served as a primary source of emotional and practical support, talking to other veiled Muslim women about their victimisation experiences was by far the most commonly cited source of support, as can be seen in the quotations below.

> *There is no formal support. I just phone my friends. I tell them what happened and we talk about it. Some of them wear the veil so they do understand.*
>
> Yasmine, 28 years old

> *We have to discuss it. We can't bottle these things up. Personally, I talk to my sisters [also veiled]. We compare notes kind of thing and we draw strength from the fact that we are not on our own.*

> *We do Arabic every Tuesday [at the mosque] and we have morning coffees [gatherings for veiled Muslim women] every Wednesday. Since I've been going there for the last three years, it's like a little sister circle. That helps.*
>
> Focus group participants

Evidently, participants emphasised the importance of being able to talk through their victimisation experiences with other veiled Muslim women. In this sense, sharing their experiences was extremely useful in terms of offering mutual support and reassurance to each other. In light of this, it is likely that the focus group interviews served as a form of supportive listening and sharing of common experiences amongst participants. Empathising with other veiled Muslim women who had been attacked and knowing that they were not alone in their experiences was potentially beneficial to them. Similarly, we saw earlier in this chapter that focus group participants often gave each other practical advice, for example, in terms of safety management and ways to deal with Islamophobic incidents in a positive manner.

However, some participants revealed that they would not normally disclose their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation to anyone, including family, friends or even other veiled Muslim women. They felt stigmatised by such incidents and this feeling was reinforced by being treated insensitively by others. This coincides with the assertion presented in Chapter Six that there was a sense of resignation on the part of participants who had accepted that incidents of Islamophobic victimisation were going to happen as long as they wore the veil. This fact, in combination with feelings of shame and fear of being blamed, had resulted in this victimisation not being disclosed to anyone, as indicated in the quotations below.

> *I don't tell my friends because I'm so used to it. It's not even something to talk about anymore. It happens all the time, so what?*
>
> Aisha, 34 years old

> *Other veiled sisters that I know don't really talk about it. I don't tell anyone and same with everyone else I think. It's embarrassing so I just forget about it.*
>
> Jamilah, 28 years old

It appears from the above analysis that seeking help from family and friends and being able to talk to other veiled Muslim women can be helpful. At the same time though, disclosure of victimisation can make veiled Muslim women vulnerable on the basis that they may encounter hostility, disbelief or judgmental attitudes, and this can have a harmful effect upon them to the extent of revictimising them. Correspondingly, for several participants there was little support from relatives and friends (despite often being Muslims themselves) whilst in some cases, the support was very negative. Clearly, participants with little or negative support had more difficulty in coping with the effects of Islamophobic victimisation (Spalek, 2006). Equally worryingly, those participants who did not disclose their victimisation experiences to family and friends were less likely to report such incidents to the police or another organisation. This discussion shows that veiled Muslim women sometimes suffer in silence, concealing their experiences of Islamophobic abuse with no support system and nowhere to turn for help except for the Muslim God, *Allah*. This is epitomised by a comment made by Wadiah.

> *My [Muslim] family don't understand. They will just say to me 'Do not wear it then' or 'We told you so'. I don't get support from my family or friends. I get support from Him [Allah] and from knowing that what I'm doing is right.*
>
> Wadiah, 40 years old

Such an observation chimes with the sentiments expressed by a substantial proportion of participants who found solace in their faith. This finding supports earlier research showing that Islam can act as an important support mechanism for Muslim women. Spalek's (2002) study of Muslim women found that prayer and meditation were common responses to crime. Bullock's (2008) study found that Muslim women who wore the *hijab* in Canada connected their ability to withstand negative comments to the strength of their faith. Participants in Hannan's (2011) study felt that *Allah* would protect them, especially since they were wearing it for Him. This discussion supports the contention made in Chapter Six that veiled Muslim women sometimes interpret this form of targeted victimisation as a 'test' and that they will be

‘rewarded’ if they continue to wear the veil despite adversities in the present life. Moreover, participants drew strength from the fact that they would be given ‘real’ justice in *jannah* (paradise), as indicated in the quotations below.

> *There is a verse in the Quran which says that ‘They are laughing at you now but on the Day of Judgment you will be laughing and they will be crying’ so I always remember this verse.*
>
> Iman, 37 years old

> *We are not here to enjoy ourselves. We are here to be tested. Every difficulty that we go through is a test. We believe in the hereafter and in the afterlife there will be real justice for us. That’s our consolation for all the abuse we suffer.*
>
> *Allah is the only one who can help us. Allah knows the pain we feel and the things that have happened to us. Allah knows about it. It’s not for everybody and everyone to know about these issues. As long as Allah knows about them, we will get justice in jannah.*
>
> Focus group participants

At first sight, there was a sense of support within the Muslim community on the basis that all Muslims were vulnerable post 9/11. Such comments were made by a number of participants:

> *In Islam we are a big family. We support each other a lot. Especially after 9/11 and the amount of hatred that is directed towards Muslims, we’ve all gone through very similar experiences.*
>
> *This is our jihad. We know that this is the price to pay for being Muslims. Because we have that shared experience we become stronger.*
>
> Focus group participants

However, despite such feelings of shared victimisation experiences, there was no formal support in place for actual and potential victims of Islamophobia in the local Muslim community. Consequently, many participants felt helpless in the sense that they could not break free from the web of Islamophobia which affected every facet of their lives. Moreover, not only there was no formal support but also the problem of Islamophobia was not discussed enough, if at all, within the local Muslim community. Throughout the interviews and focus group discussions, participants referred to local Muslim organisations, whose services were perceived to be useful but not adequate enough, especially for veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia. This issue was also acknowledged by local Muslim organisations such as the Federation of Muslim Organisations (FMO) in Leicestershire. The consensus view was that there was a lack of adequate support for victims of Islamophobia and veiled Muslim women in particular, as indicated in the quotations below.

> *Islamophobia is not discussed enough in the Muslim community. There is no support for women in veil. In fact sisters are taking it off because of this Islamophobia.*
>
> Arifa, 48 years old

> *We don't know where to go. The FMO [Federation of Muslim Organisations] doesn't have the resources and the capability to help us.*
>
> Iffat, 25 years old

> *No, there isn't any support in the Muslim community. We want to fit in and we feel that if we talk about it, if we bring it up, we'll have to deal with it. We don't want to stir up trouble because it's going to create problems in the local community where there are Muslims and non-Muslims together.*
>
> Yara, 26 years old

It's very ad hoc in relation to support. We don't have strong structures in place that would help them so there is no particular place to go. What people try to do in a very informal setting, they ring around and say 'Look, this person has been traumatised as a result of that do you know anybody within the community who may be able to offer some time freely on a voluntary basis, to offer solidarity and support to the individual?'

Representative, Federation of Muslim Organisations

As a number of participants were keen to stress, part of the reason why the victimisation of veiled Muslim women is not discussed enough within the local community is the fact that Muslim organisations in Leicester are predominantly male-orientated and as a result, Muslim women's voices are not heard. This ties in with the suggestions of Garland *et al*. (2006) who argued that community leaders are usually middle-aged or elderly males who are often ignorant of the concerns of those they are supposed to be speaking on behalf of, particularly in relation to the needs and experiences of younger community members or those of females. The following quotations help to illustrate some of the key concerns raised by participants in relation to the exclusion of women from Muslim organisations in Leicester.

The FMO [Federation of Muslim Organisations] has to take some responsibility for the fact that it is not always hearing the Muslim women's voice. It took a long time for women to even get to radio Ramadan, for a female voice to be heard on radio Ramadan and why should it take so long?

Zohra, 43 years old

> *I don't think Muslim leaders, who are predominantly men, which is sad, have done enough. I definitely don't think that local Muslim organisations have taken enough responsibility. In 2012 we still have mosques in Leicester, that have been built on the gold and the money of women, that close their doors to women at the time of prayer. I believe it is a crime, it is injustice and it goes against the ethos of Islam.*
>
> Duniya, 27 years old

As the latter quotation infers, local mosques were perceived by participants as male-dominated places of worship that did not accommodate the needs of Muslim women in terms of prayer, let alone supporting them as victims of Islamophobia. On the one hand, mosques were understood as a valuable source of spiritual development. On the other hand, certain local mosques excluded Muslim women due to their gender. This ties in with the suggestions of Sallah (2010) who found that women were not allowed in certain mosques in Leicester; for example, only four mosques out of Leicester's 29 mosques allowed women on their premises. This is a shame because not only Muslim women cannot go into these mosques to pray and be part of a communion but also, it prevents them from reporting their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation to the imam, the spiritual leader of the mosque, especially if they do not feel comfortable or confident enough to report their victimisation experiences to the police or other official sources.

Unarguably, the exclusion of women from certain mosques fails to facilitate a multi-faceted approach from different agencies including statutory and voluntary service providers as well as community-based Muslim organisations, namely mosques, thereby preventing third-party reporting techniques. Rather than promoting community resistance, there is a sense of stoic resignation prevalent in certain mosques in parallel with a sense of fear of exposing the problem of Islamophobia. As the following comments indicate, imams were sometimes seen as dismissive of the problem of Islamophobia on the basis that they failed to raise awareness about this issue and offer advice on how to deal with it.

When imams talk to you about the niqab they don't tell you about all these other things that can happen when you wear it. They stress 'This is what Allah said, you have to do it' but they don't consider the environment because we are not in a Muslim country. Imams are not sensitive to the dangers of wearing the niqab and if even they do know, most of them do not do much about it anyway.

Shelina, 36 years old

Most imams dismiss it. They don't think it is important. Imams are probably confined in that environment whereby they have to teach and preach so I don't think they go out on the street to see what's happening to Muslim women. But even if you live in a bubble per se as an imam, you must, it is your duty as the spiritual leader to know what's happening in the community and raise awareness about it.

Roukia, 27 years old

Whilst conducting focus group discussions at mosques, I realised that there was a sense of tolerance and even a state of denial prevalent in the local Muslim community in relation to the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women as actual and potential victims of Islamophobia. I also felt that there was a sense of community insulation that inhibited veiled Muslim women from seeking formal help. I was advised by an imam in a local mosque to focus on the positive aspects of the wearing of the veil rather than discussing the victimisation experiences of veiled Muslim women. Also, I was told that I disrupted notions of community cohesion between Muslims and non-Muslims in the local community by conducting this research. Correspondingly, I witnessed incidents in mosques where participants were encouraged both implicitly and explicitly by other participants (in some occasions by their teachers) to minimise and even deny the existence of Islamophobic victimisation. Clearly, there is an ideology which encourages veiled Muslim women to keep quiet about their experiences of Islamophobia in public. But whilst ignoring, minimising or dismissing the abuse, it does not prevent veiled Muslim women from being attacked, let alone being affected by this abuse.

The following quotations illustrate the importance of mosques becoming more receptive and open to women.

> *The mosques should be more friendly to women because according to our religion, men and women should be free to worship in the mosque. But because of cultural barriers most mosques that have been set up are only for men. Especially in Leicester and within Asian Muslim communities, they don't accommodate women in the mosques. They feel the woman's place is in the home so the mentality is that if women stayed home, they wouldn't be abused in public. That's what they think.*
>
> Maryam, 28 years old

> *There are no support groups even at mosques. Mosques are male-orientated completely. We have so many mosques in Leicester. There should be something for Muslim women. We should be able to have support groups. It's like nobody wants to talk about it. Everybody is reluctant to talk about it.*
>
> Sarah, 31 years old

> *The mosques are not really geared towards providing support. That's not to say they can't, they could but they need to become a bit more receptive and open to women first before they are able to do that.*
>
> Representative, St Philip's Centre, Leicester

In addition to gender, race and ethnicity were also potential factors to being excluded in certain mosques in Leicester. For example, participants who did not belong to the more 'established' local Muslim communities – namely, the Indian or the Pakistani community – revealed that they did not feel welcomed in certain mosques. Correspondingly, the white English converts who took part in the study as well as some of the black interviewees felt that they had not been seen and treated as 'proper Muslims' in specific mosques. For these participants, this had led to a sense of alienation and non-belonging to

the Muslim community, which added to existing feelings of vulnerability and trauma because of their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation. Similarly, Sallah (2010) found that black Muslims felt alienated in the Muslim community in Leicester because of being excluded in certain mosques due to their gender, race or ethnicity.[39] Sallah (2010) argues that the Muslim community in Leicester (as elsewhere) is not homogeneous and this means that different sections of the Muslim community tend to keep to themselves. The exclusion of women and of certain racial and ethnic communities in specific mosques is an obvious example of this.

7.3.2 Formal support network

In contrast to the service offered by local Muslim organisations which was deemed 'unsatisfactory', the services provided by national Muslim organisations were seen as significantly more effective. At the same time though, only a small minority of participants were aware of, or had made use of, these services. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the veiled Muslim women who took part in this study were not aware of the services offered by Muslim organisations on a national level. It is important to note that there are many national Muslim organisations that provide support and advocacy for Muslim women (and men). For example, a couple of participants referred to the Muslim Women's Helpline (2013), which offers a free and confidential listening service to Muslim women and girls in crisis situations, in addition to offering practical assistance and referring them to Islamic consultants.

Similarly, the MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) project offers advice and assistance to Muslims for reporting Islamophobic incidents to the police and is willing to report incidents to the police on victims' behalf (MAMA, 2013). MAMA also engages in research and advocacy in order to challenge and reduce the problem of Islamophobia. Although MAMA works with a range of community organisations to cater for the needs of victims of Islamophobia, it does not provide individual support to victims. However, those participants who had used the Tell MAMA services stated that they felt very supported despite the fact that this organisation does not offer individual

[39] For example, black Muslim men who went to mosques where they did not belong to the dominant sect, were turned away or asked to go to the back rows (Sallah, 2010).

support *per se*. This shows that the quality of support offered during the reporting of an incident can have a great impact upon the victim and this will unarguably determine the victim's decision to report future Islamophobic incidents to MAMA or another official organisation. This emphasises the importance of the quality of service provided to those who make their first contact, as they may decide whether or not to report future incidents to the police or another 'official' organisation based on their first (un)successful attempt.

Moreover, some participants referred to advocacy and campaigning initiatives by national Muslim organisations that have attempted to increase the awareness of Islamophobia amongst Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Such organisations include the Forum against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR, 2013), an independent organisation that aims to eliminate racism and religious hatred against Muslims in the UK. Parallel to the work of MAMA, FAIR monitors and records incidents of Islamophobia although it does not offer support to victims. In a similar vein, the Islamic Human Rights Commission (2013) is primarily a campaigning organisation that works to advocate the elimination of Islamophobic victimisation. Although it operates an online form for reporting Islamophobic incidents in the UK, it does not provide counselling services. Wolhuter, Olley and Denham (2009) point out that although these organisations engage in advocacy rather than direct services to victims, they nonetheless qualify as victim support agencies by virtue of the fact that their advocacy has assisted the government to recognise the need for appropriate criminal justice responses to victims of Islamophobia.

In contrast to the services offered by the aforementioned advocacy and campaigning initiatives, there was a lack of faith and even a sense of suspicion amongst participants in terms of the quality of support available from mainstream victim services such as Victim Support[40] and the Witness Service[41]. Spalek (2006) argues that mainstream victim services fail to help

[40] Victim Support (2013a) is a national charity providing free and confidential, emotional and practical support to victims of crime in England and Wales. Victim Support also operates the Witness Service.

[41] The Witness Service provides victims and witnesses of crime with emotional and practical support, and information before, during and after the trial, within Crown and Magistrates

victims from minority ethnic communities for whom religious affiliation is a fundamental aspect of their self-identity. Consequently, the fact that mainstream victim services are secular in nature (since they do not address people's religious and spiritual needs) has resulted in low uptake of service delivery by such communities (Wolhuter *et al*., 2009). As such, it may be preferable to seek assistance from Muslim organisations on the basis that, unlike secular agencies such as Victim Support, these organisations are sensitive to their cultural and religious views and needs (Spalek, 2006). However, it is important to note that those participants who had been referred to Victim Support and the Witness Service stated that they had received a valuable service. This is encapsulated by the views of Rahimah and Mahmooda who had received support from Victim Support and the Witness Service, respectively.

> *Victim Support were very good. I had a counsellor who came out to see me over a period of time until I was ready to be able to cope on my own and that really did help me. She was female and she was very sensitive to my needs and very understanding. I wasn't confident to go to their office because I had lost my confidence and this had impacted upon my independence. So she was coming to my house and that helped me a lot.*
>
> Rahimah, 44 years old

> *I had no idea how the court works. It was a little bit confusing at the start but fortunately the Witness Service regularly phoned me, they wrote to me and I was given a DVD about what happens in court, which was useful.*
>
> Mahmooda, 27 years old

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courts in England and Wales (Victim Support, 2013b). The Witness Service offers witnesses a pre-trial court familiarisation visit so that they know what to expect on the day. In the case of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses, the Witness Service can ask the court to provide screens to prevent the witness from having to see the defendant or alternatively, the witness can give evidence via a live CCTV link.

The Witness and Victim Experience Survey (WAVES), a large-scale survey of victims and witnesses undertaken in England and Wales, provides detailed information on the experiences and perceptions of victims and witnesses. For 2011-2012, it was estimated that the majority of victims (87 per cent) who had contact with Victim Support were satisfied with the support provided to them (Franklyn, 2012). Likewise, the majority of victims and witnesses (96 per cent) who had contact with the Witness Service were satisfied with the service (Franklyn, 2012). Despite the high levels of victims' satisfaction, take up of services by victims of hate crime has been generally slow (Dunn, 2007). Correspondingly, the majority of participants in this study revealed that they had never heard of Victim Support and would not therefore have the opportunity to use its services and potentially benefit from it.

In light of this, it is important to assess how victims of crime are being referred to Victim Support. In this regard, victims are referred to Victim Support via the police or self-referrals. However, Victim Support receives very few referrals from the police (and even fewer self-referrals) concerning individuals who have suffered hate crime victimisation (Dunn, 2007). As Spalek (2006) observes in the context of minority ethnic groups, the majority of victims of racist crime are unlikely to be referred for support because of the significant level of under-reporting of this type of crime to the police. The overwhelming majority of referrals that Victim Support receives from the police relate to stereotypical crime victims of burglary, theft, criminal damage and violent offences whereas hate crime referrals – as well as domestic and sexual violence referrals – tend to account for a very small percentage of the total number of referrals. This suggests that although Victim Support might have the capacity to respond adequately to the particular religious and cultural needs of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia, the low levels of referrals from the police coupled with the low levels of self-referrals prevent victims from receiving support.

Related to the point of low take up of official services by victims of hate crime, participants' discussions regarding the reporting of Islamophobic incidents focused predominantly upon the police service. Although I asked participants about their willingness to report to a range of different organisations including Leicester City Council, Victim Support as well as local

and national Muslim organisations, it was clear that the police was perceived as the only agency that they could refer to. For Dunn (2007), this highlights the hegemony of the criminal justice system in the victim domain on the basis that the police are perceived as the primary provider of services to victims and witnesses of crime *per se*. Accordingly, the majority of participants stated that they were not aware of the existence and role of other agencies, and as a result they were reluctant to report Islamophobic incidents to agencies other than the police. For example, most participants were not aware that advocacy and campaigning Muslim organisations such as MAMA, FAIR and the Islamic Human Rights Commission existed and how they could be of assistance. Consequently, they felt that reporting to an agency other than the police was a rather futile exercise. This line of argument highlights the widespread lack of awareness that exists amongst veiled Muslim women with regard to what support services might be available. Ultimately, the police were seen as *the* official gatekeepers to justice. At the same time though, there were significant barriers for participants to report their victimisation experiences to the police.

7.4 Barriers to informing the police

Throughout the interviews and focus group discussions, it became apparent that the vast majority of participants did not report their victimisation experiences to the police or other official sources. Correspondingly, only five participants out of 60 individual interviews had reported an Islamophobic incident to the police.[42] Evidence from the British Crime Survey (2009/10; 2010/11) suggests that over 50 per cent of hate crime incidents go unreported (Smith, Lader, Hoare and Lau, 2012). In line with this, empirical research indicates that the vast majority of anti-Muslim hate crime remains unreported (see Allen, 2010b; Allen and Nielsen, 2002; Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, 2004; European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia, 2007; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009; Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010; Open Society Institute,

[42] Unfortunately, it was not possible to assess the reporting behaviour of participants who took part in the focus group interviews, as I was not allowed to take notes during these sessions, for example, in terms of the number of participants.

2005). Allen *et al*. (2013) point out that official data[43] is highly conservative in comparison to what the real picture might look like, particularly in relation to Islamophobic attacks targeted towards Muslim women because their willingness and receptivity to report such incidents is significantly low. Lambert and Githens-Mazer (2011) found that the majority of anti-Muslim hate crimes in which Muslim women wearing *hijabs* and *niqabs* had been assaulted, abused or intimidated remained unreported.

This discussion shows that official criminal justice statistics are not a reliable indicator of the extent of hate crime and Islamophobic victimisation in particular. Clearly, this makes it difficult to assess or quantify the scale of the problem. Equally worryingly, the targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women remains an 'invisible' problem whilst victims do not get the support and justice they deserve; rather, they suffer in silence. Additional vulnerability factors such as being older or disabled might make it even more difficult for veiled Muslim women to come forward and receive support. It is therefore important to understand the reasons behind veiled Muslim women's reluctance to report this victimisation to the police.

Accordingly, a common reason for non-reporting was participants' perceptions that the police would fail to recognise the severity of this victimisation. As such, they felt that the police would see their victimisation experiences as minor, trivial incidents and therefore fail to take them seriously. This ties in with the suggestions of Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) who found that the majority of anti-Muslim hate crimes were not reported to the police either because of a lack of confidence in the police or because victims were unaware of a police interest. Whilst I was conducting individual interviews with representatives from local organisations such as the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, Victim Support, Witness Service, Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council, I was reassured that they do take the reporting of such incidents very seriously. As the series

[43] From 2011 to 2012, 43,748 hate crimes were recorded by the police, of which: 35,816 (82%) were race hate crimes; 1,621 (4%) were religious-based hate crimes; 4,252 (10%) were sexual orientation hate crimes; 1,744 (4%) were disability hate crimes; 315 (1%) were transgender hate crimes (Copsey *et al*., 2013). In the context of religiously motivated hate crime in Leicester City, there were 102 incidents in 2009-2010, 107 incidents in 2010-2011, and 45 incidents from August 2011 to December 2011 although no information is provided on the number of Islamophobic hate crimes in particular (Leicestershire Constabulary, 2012).

of quotations below help to illustrate, the 'message' from these organisations was that Islamophobic attacks towards veiled Muslim women would be taken seriously provided that victims did come forward and reported their experiences.

> *We do take it very seriously. We don't tolerate it.*
>
> Hate Crime Officer, Leicester Police

> *I am hugely disappointed [that victims are reluctant to contact the police] because that would suggest that there is a failure in our links out to these women. My message is 'We do take these things seriously'.*
>
> Police Chief Inspector, Leicester

> *Victims will be taken seriously. The police and the prosecution are absolutely committed to tackling race hate and religious hate. It's got no place in our society.*
>
> Senior Crown Prosecutor, CPS, Leicester

> *From a Victim Support level, hate crime is high on our agenda and it's something we take very seriously.*
>
> Manager, Victim Support, Leicester

However, such claims were refuted by the majority of participants who felt that these organisations' understanding of Islam, Muslims and the veil is extremely poor. In particular, most participants were adamant that the police would fail to understand the seriousness of the case, empathise with them and accommodate their religious and cultural needs, for example, in terms of offering a female officer. This is in line with James and Simmonds' (2013) key finding regarding the implementation gap between 'specialists' in hate crime and 'key workers' on the ground. The following comments help to illustrate some of the key concerns raised by participants in relation to a lack of understanding and empathy within the police service.

The police won't help us. They think we are some kind of monsters. Irene, if you were bullied because you are Greek they would take it seriously but if I was abused because I'm Muslim, they wouldn't take it seriously. The law says they should protect all so they should protect us Muslims as well.

Nabeeha, 22 years old

We feel that the police will not take it seriously. They don't understand women in veil anyway so how are they going to deal with this crime? They probably think we shouldn't cover our face anyway.

We feel misunderstood by the police. I've got stares from the police as well. I walked past the police and the police officer looked at me thinking 'You are one of the terrorists'. I could tell.

Focus group participants

As can be seen in the quotations above, there was a lack of confidence in the police, particularly in terms of taking the reporting of an Islamophobic incident seriously and being treated as a 'suspect community'. Along similar lines, participants in Chakraborti and Garland's (2004) studies on rural racism reported that their cases had not been taken seriously and that the police had failed to understand the impact of racism. James and Simmonds (2013) observe that the tendency of hate crime to manifest in multiple incidents, rather than one-off serious crimes, has failed to clearly articulate hate crime to police and related agencies. Choudhury and Fenwick (2011) point out that in cases where the police fail to take it seriously, it undermines victims' trust and confidence in the police and criminal justice system as a whole. Taking a similar view, Spalek (2006) observes that victims' satisfaction with the police response is important on the basis that police officers are the first point of contact that victims have with the criminal justice system. Indeed, the initial contact with the police is crucial because the service that victims and witnesses receive from that first contact determines their confidence in the criminal justice system as well as their expectations

of other agencies. As such, a poor experience with the police is likely to have a detrimental impact upon victims' perceptions of the wider criminal justice system, and potentially discourage them from reporting future incidents.

Evidently, participants had little confidence in the police on the basis of either their previous negative experiences or, more commonly, their negative impressions of that agency. Correspondingly, several participants recounted past negative experiences from the police and this had led them to question the purpose of reporting their experiences of victimisation again in the future. They noted that even in cases in which the police were informed about a specific incident no arrests were made. In the context of focus group interviews, participants overwhelmingly agreed with the view that 'the police would fail to take action', as illustrated in the following observations.

> *I was travelling to Birmingham by train and as I got off the station a man grabbed my niqab and pulled it off. I did report it to the police but nothing gets done.*
>
> *I called the police there and then. It was in London. I got off the bus and an elderly woman pulled my veil down. The police managed to find her through CCTV camera but nothing actually happened.*
>
> *We did report it to the police when we had racist abuse from our neighbours but they didn't really do anything.*
>
> Focus group participants

The issue of whether an Islamophobic incident should be reported to the police was debated amongst participants in the context of focus group interviews. Evidently, there was a deep-seated mistrust towards the police whereas confidence in educational institutions such as the University of Leicester was significantly higher based on the premise that academic research has genuine interest and potential in raising public awareness and influencing policy about the problem of Islamophobia. These views are

typified in this dialogue between two focus group participants in an Islamic community centre in Leicester.

> *Participant A: I wouldn't contact the police. I don't know anybody who has contacted the police. Why should I? What can they do for us?*
>
> *Participant B: But you wouldn't be here [taking part in the focus group interview] if you really believed that.*
>
> *Participant A: That's a different story, organisations like the University of Leicester genuinely care but the police with their reputation and their position, they become a bit high and mighty, they pretend they take their job seriously but they don't really care about us.*
>
> Focus group participants

A core theme underpinning this chapter is that participants were largely disparaging of the police. As a number of participants were keen to stress, the police was seen as a racist organisation and this was a significant barrier for reporting an Islamophobic incident to the police. Allen (2010b) emphasises that a high proportion of British Muslims perceive the police to be racist. In light of the increasingly frequent equation of Muslims and terrorists in the aftermath of 9/11 (McGhee, 2005), the use of stop and search powers – which have become a key part of the government's 'tough on terrorism' agenda – have produced tensions between Asian youths and the police in cities with large Muslim populations including London, Manchester and Birmingham (Khan and Mythen, 2008). Taking a similar position, Mythen *et al.* (2009) note that the 'targeting' of people of Muslim appearance with respect to stop and search practices has increased the level of distrust of British police. Certainly, the argument that the police have acted unfairly in the way they exercise their powers to stop and search ethnic minorities has been documented elsewhere (see, for example, Chakraborti, 2007; McGhee, 2005). Accordingly, participants described incidents where

male members of their families had been subjected to, often humiliating, incidents of stop and search by the police either on the street or at airports. This issue was cited as a common reason behind participants' views of the police as a racist organisation.

> *I am reluctant to go to the police. There is a lot of racism going on in the police anyway.*
>
> Latifah, 46 years old

> *I feel the authorities hate Muslims. Lots of Muslim brothers have been suspected of terrorism and they have been arrested and then they have been released because it was found that they weren't really guilty.*
>
> Nisha, 28 years old

> *There is still a perception that the police are racist. That's not my view but I know that that's what some people think and obviously the conviction of Lawrence's killers 18 years after the event might serve to enforce that view in some black and minority ethnic communities. Unfortunately, whilst we don't think that Leicestershire police as an organisation is institutionally racist, the stop and search figures actually suggest otherwise, similar to a number of forces around the country.*
>
> Senior Crown Prosecutor, CPS, Leicester

In addition to problematic policing action as a consequence of stop and search procedures, participants referred to the routine forms of surveillance, scrutiny and intimidation that their families, friends and fellow Muslims had experienced at the hands of the police. Within the framework of 'hard' engagement strategies[44], Awan (2013) suggests that counter-terrorism policing operations have a significant impact upon the Muslim community's

[44] 'Hard' strategies include intelligence gathering as well as utilising community surveillance and informants whilst 'soft' strategies prioritise trust building and community policing (Copsey *et al*., 2013).

perception of the police service. The installation of secret CCTV cameras to effectively ring-fence the Muslim community in predominately Muslim areas in Birmingham and monitor their movements has led to the wider Muslim community being distrustful of the police (Awan, 2012). Along similar lines, participants in this study referred to past incidents where local imams were interrogated by Leicester Police about their links with Islamist terrorist groups. Feeling stigmatised as potential terrorists or terrorist sympathisers had led to the reluctance of Muslims in the local community to report Islamophobic incidents to the police, as the following quotation illustrates.

> *A few years ago, there were some arrests made on imams in the local area [Highfields, Leicester] and the way it was handled was inappropriate. They were all eventually released but it damaged relationships between the community and the police, so things like that we don't forget. We think 'This is how they treat us'.*
>
> Rahimah, 44 years old

Although significant improvements have been made in the aftermath of the Macpherson Inquiry (1999) and police recording and treatment of racial and faith hate incidents have improved considerably (Chakraborti, 2007), the failure of the police service to recruit and retain Muslims has contributed to the prevailing antipathy and mistrust towards the police. A couple of participants pointed out that the almost exclusively white composition of the police meant that police officers were unable to appreciate the difficulties faced by Muslims and veiled Muslim women in particular, and as a result the police would provide an inadequate or ineffective response.

> *Even if I go to the police, if they are white they will probably do nothing about it anyway.*
>
> Raja, 40 years old

> *If I go to the police, if they are white they will take the white person's side. They won't take my side or Islam's side, forget it.*
>
> Arifa, 48 years old

We need to get more Muslims in the police force. I would personally join the police but I know that they will not accept me. I'd love to go work for the police, I'd love to work for the council but I know that they will never accept me with my niqab.

Kalila, 29 years old

Overall, a lack of confidence in the police – whether borne from personal experience or from the reputation of that particular organisation – is quite possibly the most fundamental barrier facing victims of Islamophobia, affecting nearly every aspect of acquiring victim services. At the same time though, several participants pointed out that regardless of the (in)effectiveness of police responses, it was important to report their victimisation experiences in order to send a 'message' to all the parties involved – such as victims, perpetrators and criminal justice agencies – that Islamophobia is not acceptable. From this perspective, the act of reporting Islamophobic incidents purports to send out a clear message from the individual victim and their community that Islamophobic abuse, harassment and violence are unacceptable forms of behaviour. As is clear from the quotations given below, the participants who were willing to contact the police, albeit a minority, appeared to do so because of the following reasons: prevention of attacks upon other veiled Muslim women, giving confidence to other victims of Islamophobia to come forward, and last but not least, to teach perpetrators a 'lesson', that they will not get away with it.

I was at the beauty warehouse [in Birmingham], I pressed the intercom and the receptionist said 'Come in ninja' and I said 'I beg your pardon?' and she said 'I told you, come in ninja', she said it twice actually, and then I said 'In that case, I am not coming in'. I called the police, they came and interviewed me so they took my statement, went to that person and she obviously denied everything but for me the message went across, that I am not going to sit back and take that abuse.

Fariza, 29 years old

It [reporting it to the police] gave out a good message and I'm glad that I did go through with it. It is hard, I'm not going to say it is easy but the fact that I did report it made me realise that they can't get away with it. It gives a strong message to perpetrators but it also gives the message to women like myself that 'Look, if these people abuse you, there will be consequences' so it gives confidence to other sisters to actually report these incidents.

Rahimah, 44 years old

Whilst some participants argued that ideally they would like to report each and every Islamophobic incident, there still remained a range of inhibitory factors. For example, one of the most significant barriers to reporting took the form of evidential requirements, the absence of which would result in the police failing to bring offenders to justice. The Crown Prosecution Service facilitates its prosecutorial decisions by gauging the strength of the evidence. A lack of tangible evidence – such as incidents where the offender(s) cannot be identified – was an important factor in preventing participants from reporting Islamophobic incidents to the police. This infers that a high proportion of incidents of Islamophobic victimisation will not come to the police's attention by virtue of the fact that the victim assumes that no action will be taken without what they regard as 'concrete' evidence, as the following quotations illustrate.

There are practical difficulties like a lack of evidence. Most of the time, it's my word against theirs, isn't it? I don't know who they are, I can't describe them and so how can I report that?

Tashia, 45 years old

It's people passing by. I don't know them. I can't really stop them and ask them their name and address.

Hakimah, 22 years old

> *The police can't do anything about it because that person said the comment and they're gone. I can't identify them. I don't know who they are or where they live. The police will want to know descriptions, names, times and places. They spend about two days filling in paperwork and asking silly questions like 'What colour shoes was he wearing?' or 'What colour was his eyes?' Are they really going to do anything about it? No, I don't think so.*
>
> Shantaz, 38 years old

Related to the significance of compelling evidence, the fact that this victimisation is 'part and parcel' of wearing the veil can affect reporting behaviour in many ways. We saw in Chapter Six that several participants did not regard incidents of name-calling, being spat at, and taking the veil off as 'crimes', which they thought was a term applicable to only the most violent or extreme forms of victimisation such as serious physical assaults including rape, armed robbery, murder and criminal damage. In this context, non-reporting was also illustrative of participants' reluctance to bracket themselves as 'victims' by involving the police as they felt that 'low-level' manifestations of Islamophobia were 'normal' and therefore there was no need to report them.

Equally importantly, the fact that such experiences were so common meant that it was difficult for participants to report every single incident. This ties in with the suggestions of Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) who found that although some of the more serious attacks had been reported to police, the overwhelming majority of victims had not reported the 'less serious' incidents. For example, typical incidents that had not been reported to the police included men spitting at Muslim women wearing *hijab* or *niqab* on the streets of London. Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) concluded that crime seriousness was the principal determinant of reporting such incidents. Echoing the same view, participants in this study stated that it was pointless to report 'low-level' incidents since they were so common. The following quotations are illustrative of the normalisation of Islamophobic victimisation.

When I was spat at [in the city centre in Northampton], the only reason the police were involved was because there was one officer there who witnessed it, otherwise I wouldn't have thought that being spat at is a crime.

A man in town [Leicester city centre] pulled my veil off but I didn't phone the police. Do you go to the police for something little?

Reporting incidents to the police can become a full-time occupation. We'd have to spend every minute of our day in the police station because it's really that common.

Focus group participants

Furthermore, a fear of breaking confidentiality was identified as an important barrier to reporting Islamophobic incidents to the police. In this regard, some participants feared harassment or retaliation by the perpetrators whilst others feared unwanted media attention. Moreover, some participants stated that they did not want their family, friends and local community to know the details of the case but they felt that there was a good chance of the media publishing the case had they reported it to the police. Allen *et al*. (2013) contend that for many Muslim women there is a very real sense of fear and mistrust in dealing with the police and state agencies. In addition, cultural and religious factors combine with that mistrust to create additional obstacles.

Dunn (2007) observes that there is a sense of shame, embarrassment and humiliation associated with being a victim *per se* in certain minority ethnic and religious communities. Spalek (2006) notes that there are significant cultural differences in the way in which particular communities understand experiences of being a victim. For example, in contemporary Western society there is a 'cult of victimhood' whereby individuals are increasingly identifying themselves with notions of victimhood (Spalek, 2006). Crucially, this notion of self-confessional approach in Western societies is in contrast to the mentality in traditional minority communities whereby individuals may prefer not to disclose information about negative or traumatic events for fear of exacerbating the problem (Spalek, 2006).

With this in mind, it is important to recognise that the cultural context that keeps minority ethnic women who have suffered domestic violence from informing the authorities is relevant to the reasons for non-reporting Islamophobic victimisation. In South Asian cultures, married women are seen as the guardians of the family honour (*izzat*), which primarily involves male honour (Bhopal, 1997). From this perspective, South Asian women bear the responsibility for the successful transmission of religion and culture. In the context of domestic violence, any engagement with the police brings shame upon the family and destroys the family honour (Spalek, 2006). As such, informing the authorities might be seen as a 'betrayal of community values', which could expose women to the risk of punishment (Spalek, 2006). Ultimately, South Asian women who have experienced domestic violence are constrained to keep this abuse private (Gill, 2004). The same line of reasoning might prevent veiled Muslim women, particularly of South Asian origin, from reporting Islamophobic incidents to the police, as the following quotations illustrate.

> *I don't mind joining research but, individually, I wouldn't report it. Even in a domestic violence situation, I didn't report it.*
>
> Dahab, 52 years old

> *Asian women like being submissive, it's normal. They don't want to come forward. It's possibly cultural, especially if they are from Pakistan. The Pakistani culture is very reserved. They wouldn't like the woman to study, they wouldn't allow her the freedom of choice to marry or choice to veil. Such cases do exist, definitely.*
>
> Sarah, 31 years old

> *It has more to do with culture than it has to do with religion because a similar pattern follows Asian women and women from the Hindu and Sikh background. It's a very Eastern kind of philosophy where the roles of women are different to the roles of men in comparison to the Western society that we live in.*
>
> Maha, 40 years old

In addition, there might be a lack of confidence of victims in themselves due to language barriers or their immigration status. For example, immigrants may believe that they will not be understood because of language barriers whilst illegal immigrants in particular may fear losing the right to remain in the UK and being deported if they report a crime to the police (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010). Kaplan (2007) suggests that first generation immigrants tend to be more mistrustful of authority, and doubtful immigration status makes them more reticent to report hate crimes. Moreover, many Muslim immigrants come from countries where governments do not protect their citizens' legal rights, and crimes are thus left to be avenged by family or tribal relations of the victim (Kaplan, 2007). In this case, the reticence of victims to come forward could be due to the fact that their experiences with state authorities in their countries of origin are very negative and therefore they do not trust the police in the UK to protect them (Kaplan, 2007).

> *I know so many sisters who do not want to come forward because they don't have enough confidence. They lack the English communication skill so that makes them less confident to report it.*
>
> Focus group participant

> *Certain communities expect women not to speak to the police because that would then bring police involvement. We get a lot of issues, especially with the Somali community. A lot of the Somalis think that if you tell the police something they will then go and tell other members of the Somali community. They think we pass them that information as they do in Somalia so they don't trust us. It is so difficult because it's not just one issue we must look at. It is a range of issues such as confidence, confidentiality and the fear of not bringing shame upon their family.*
>
> Hate Crime Officer, Leicestershire Police

Despite their reluctance to report Islamophobic incidents, a number of participants commented on how taking part in this study had made them rethink about their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation and had prompted them to reflect upon the ways in which they dealt with it. As discussed in Chapter Four, one of the reasons for employing qualitative interviewing was to empower veiled Muslim women to come forward and also, to raise awareness amongst actual and potential victims in the local community about access to relevant organisations that could support them. It is encouraging that the research study has achieved this, as can be seen in the following series of observations.

> *I feel it's a petty thing, it's not serious enough but talking about it with you has made me realise I should report it.*
>
> Sahar, 47 years old

> *Nobody takes any action about it. Nobody really cares. I am surprised you do. We didn't know that there was support until you mentioned it to us.*
>
> Zareena, 22 years old

> *I would never have thought about reporting anything. You make me think that this is something I should do.*
>
> Tahmina, 63 years old

> *We feel nobody wants to listen to us. I was shocked that you'd come to hear us. We feel that nobody wants to hear us, to see us, people don't look at us as humans anymore. They treat us like we are lepers.*

> *You have given us all this information so it has really helped because the next time somebody says to me 'This is what happened to me', I can tell them 'You do not need to suffer in silence, there is something we could do about it'.*
>
> Focus group participants

However, despite the positive feedback and comments from the participants concerning their willingness to come forward and access support, there still remained additional barriers in terms of reporting their experiences, namely giving evidence in court.

7.5 Secondary victimisation

In addition to the suffering caused by Islamophobic incidents, there is the possibility of further suffering caused by the way in which veiled Muslim women are treated within the criminal justice system (Wolhuter *et al*., 2009). In this sense, victim-blaming attitudes as well as discriminatory policies and practices that result in additional trauma and further violation of victims' rights could be understood as 'revictimisation' or 'secondary victimisation' (Cambell and Raja, 2005). Williams (1999) highlights the added impact of secondary victimisation through the police investigation and court processes. Along similar lines, Dunn and Shepherd (2006) observe that the emotional impact of giving evidence in court is likely to be particularly difficult for witnesses who may be vulnerable or intimidated.

On the evidence of this research, an additional barrier to reporting their victimisation experiences was the fact that participants feared insensitive questioning and hostile responses by criminal justice agents, particularly the police and the courts. From this perspective, victims and witnesses felt that they were the ones under investigation or on trial. Williams and Robinson (2004), whose research focused on victims of homophobia in Wales, found that victims were fearful of 'secondary victimisation', particularly from the police. Indeed, the way that the police conduct the initial interview appears to be significant. For example, questions that suggest that victims provoked the attack by wearing the veil can evoke feelings of guilt and self-blame that impair the victim's recovery process and discourage disclosure. Likewise, a lack of respect for veiled Muslim women's cultural and religious needs, such as failing to provide a female officer, could also cause the victim further suffering which amounts to secondary victimisation. Correspondingly, many participants described their experiences through the criminal justice system as frightening, intimidating and stressful.

It wasn't easy giving a statement to a male officer. It really made me understand why other sisters don't report it.

Hadiqa, 40 years old

As victims we feel frightened and intimidated to go through the criminal justice system because we know that the veil will be a problem in court. A lot of sisters are hoping they can live their lives without ever having to contact the police about anything.

Focus group participant

As these quotations suggest, a lack of understanding of veiled Muslim women's religious and cultural needs on the part of the police and the courts often prevents them from reporting their victimisation experiences. Within this framework, the fear of secondary victimisation at court compounds the victims' decision not to come forward and report their experiences to the criminal justice system, despite providing the possibility for 'special measures'. According to Human Rights First (2007), one of the reasons why victims of Islamophobia did not contact the police included a fear of going to court. In this context, veiled Muslim women as victims or witnesses of crime *per se* fear being forced to take the veil off in the courtroom.

An issue that can arise in relation to giving evidence in court is that of removing the veil on the basis that the judge, jury and lawyers must be able to see the witness's facial expressions in order to assess their credibility when giving evidence. In September 2013, a judge at Crown Court in London asked the defendant, a veiled Muslim woman, to remove the *niqab* because it was crucial for jurors to be able to see her face when giving evidence (BBC News, 2013b). The judge stated that the principle of open justice overrode the woman's religious beliefs (BBC News, 2013b). In a similar vein, in October 2010 the magistrates court in Leicester ordered a victim of domestic violence to remove her *niqab* because otherwise it would not be possible to accept her evidence (Leicester Mercury, 2010). In both cases, the witnesses refused to take their *niqab* off and the court compromised by giving them the opportunity to give evidence from behind a screen in the courtroom. Another interesting case is the refusal of a legal adviser to remove her *niqab* when

asked to do so by a judge at Crown Court in Stoke-on-Trent in November 2006 (BBC News, 2006). In this case, the judge asked the legal adviser to remove her veil because he could not hear her properly. The legal adviser refused to remove it and finally she was replaced by a male legal adviser from her firm. As the quotations below illustrate, the Witness Service and the Crown Prosecution Service as well as participants themselves acknowledged that the possibility of asking Muslim women to remove their veil could be a barrier to giving evidence in court.

> *There might be a fear that if it goes to court the veil will have to be removed. A witness may be asked to remove the veil as the court's view is that it would not enable the jury, judge and magistrates to get any indication of facial gestures.*
>
> Manager, Witness Service, Leicester

> *What we have encountered is the issue of the witness or the victim who appears at court and is wearing a veil. There may be objection from the defence, or there may be an issue as far as the judiciary are concerned, in respect of not being able to read facial expressions.*
>
> Manager, Crown Prosecution Service, Leicester

> *It was bad enough the thought of having to go to court to give evidence and then I was told I had to remove my veil. I was devastated.*
>
> Anisa, 25 years old

> *I decided to take my niqab off [when giving evidence at Leicester Crown Court] not because I wanted to but because I couldn't take the hassle.*
>
> Naureen, 38 years old

Broadly speaking, the Crown Prosecution Service guidelines suggest that the witness must be advised that if she wishes to continue to wear the veil, she is allowed to do so but the court may make less of her evidence because her facial expressions cannot be viewed and as a result assessed. Nevertheless, if the witness wishes to wear the veil, the Crown Prosecution Service can make an application for the witness to give her evidence unveiled but behind a screen so that she is not open to the public gallery. Alternatively, the witness does not have to be in the courtroom when she is giving evidence, she can give evidence over a television link. At face value, both the court and the Crown Prosecution Service offer 'special measures' such as screens to shield witnesses from defendants and live television link allowing the witness to give evidence in a separate room or even a separate building.

However, being asked to remove the veil in the first place does impede veiled Muslim women's access to criminal justice agencies and exacerbates their sense of 'difference' and 'Muslim otherness'. This discussion shows that the institutional culture of criminal justice agencies may generate secondary victimisation by fostering insensitive attitudes towards veiled Muslim women (Wolhuter *et al*., 2009). The wearing of the *niqab* is a defining factor in Muslim women's risk of Islamophobic victimisation and by encouraging victims and witnesses to remove it, the court revictimises them; for it is precisely the wearing of the *niqab* why they were attacked in the first place. From this perspective, the secondary victimisation that results from victim participation in the court process is undermining rather than vindicating veiled Muslim women's victimisation experiences.

Moreover, it is important to recognise that this approach increases the trauma of testifying by asking Muslim women to take the veil off in front of a potentially male audience, who are non-*Mahram* (marriageable) men. In this context, the court's focus on the woman's facial expressions (rather than on her testimony) serves to objectify her. This demonstrates how power, in the Foucauldian sense, is employed in court by means of legal discourses that control women as 'objects' (Wolhuter *et al*., 2009). At the same time, it is interesting to note that secondary victimisation in the court process is not only attributable to gendered attitudes on the part of the court, but is also

systemic, being embedded within male dominated constructions of adversarial processes (Wolhuter *et al*., 2009).

Seen in this context, being asked to remove the veil in court is an indirect, subtle form of institutional Islamophobia on the basis that it forces veiled Muslim women to compromise their cultural and religious beliefs. Consequently, veiled Muslim women choose to avoid involvement in the criminal process altogether thereby contributing to the significant degree of under-reporting that has been documented to exist in Islamophobic victimisation. Clearly, reforms to the procedure regarding the veil would ameliorate such secondary victimisation in court, and empower victims and witnesses of Islamophobic victimisation to come forward and report it. This discussion highlights the need to reform law and policy to better respond to veiled Muslim women's lived experiences of both primary and secondary victimisation.

7.6 Conclusion

The preceding discussion has illustrated that participants used a variety of coping strategies to deal with Islamophobic victimisation. At first sight, there were two main, yet contrasting, potential responses – passivity and resistance. Correspondingly, some participants ignored the abuse whilst others resisted it through challenging their abusers. On closer observation, it appears that ignoring the abuse was a form of resistance in itself. In this sense, coping through dismissing the abuse was a form of agency and a choice not to engage in un-Islamic behaviour and damage the public image of Islam. In terms of support, the majority of participants drew from informal networks of support such as family and friends rather than 'official' organisations mainly due to a lack of awareness of such services. Indeed knowledge of, and access to, support organisations was extremely low. Most participants were completely unaware that they could receive support from a variety of sources.

A common reason behind participants' reluctance to report this victimisation to the police was a belief that they would fail to take it seriously. In this regard, participants were more likely to involve the police if they had experienced anything particularly serious (a term which most commonly was

seen to comprise incidents of serious physical assaults and property damage). Those who had had no prior dealings with the police felt that the police would dismiss or at best fail to prioritise their case in the absence of any compelling evidence. Moreover, the predominant image of the police as a racist organisation contributed to participants' reluctance to report this victimisation. Furthermore, the fear of secondary victimisation during the investigation of the case or during the trial process reinforced participants' unwillingness to report their victimisation experiences. Finally, it was argued that veiled Muslim women not only experience Islamophobic victimisation due to specific incidents but may also experience secondary victimisation in their interactions with criminal justice agents such as the police and the courts.

Chapter Eight
Conclusions and Implications

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has sought to examine Islamophobic victimisation as experienced by veiled Muslim women, whose visible religious and cultural 'difference' immediately sets them apart from the prevailing norms of 'sameness'. However, despite their vulnerability as actual and potential victims of Islamophobia, the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women remain 'hidden' or 'silenced'. To address such an oversight, this particular study was designed to provide fresh insights into, first, the nature of Islamophobic victimisation directed towards veiled Muslim women in public places in Leicester and elsewhere; secondly, the impact of this victimisation upon victims, their families and wider Muslim communities; thirdly, the factors that constrain or facilitate the reporting of this victimisation; and fourthly, the coping strategies which are used by victims and their families in response to their experiences of Islamophobia. As such, the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women have been assessed in an analysis of notions of religion, gender, identity and 'difference'. This chapter takes stock of the key themes to have emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions, and reviews the main implications of this research before discussing ways in which the problem of Islamophobic victimisation can be addressed more effectively both in the case study itself and within academic and policymaking circles more broadly.

8.2 The targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women

As we have seen, both through previous anti-Muslim hate crime studies and through the testimonies of research participants in this particular study, veiled Muslim women are stereotypically seen as 'easy' and 'soft' targets against whom to enact Islamophobic attacks. Unarguably, this increases their vulnerability as 'ideal' victims of Islamophobia in public. Importantly, there are precipitating factors to this victimisation. Indeed, and as discussed in Chapter One, dominant perceptions of the veil as a 'threat' to gender equality,

national cohesion and public safety portray veiled Muslim women as the 'enemy within' and problematise the wearing of the veil in the UK (as elsewhere in the West).

Contemporary understandings of the veil as a symbol of gender oppression stem from colonial views of Middle Eastern women as exotic, subjugated 'other' women. Within the Orientalist framework, a sexual desire to see beneath the veil coupled with a colonial desire to 'modernise' veiled women paved the way for popular stereotypical readings of the veil that portray veiled Muslim women as a homogenised group who are *all* forced to wear it. Moreover, the wearing of the veil is associated with self-segregation and the existence of parallel communities. In this context the veil impedes face-to-face communication, and relegates its wearer to a condition of isolation due to the difficulty in communicating with a person whose face is covered. Additionally, the veil is understood as a practice synonymous with religious fundamentalism and, as such, one which fosters political extremism. In this regard, the veil is linked to the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks and the global 'War on Terror'. From this perspective, the covering of the face with the veil is seen as a 'threat' to public safety on the basis that the public have no idea who is behind the face covering – be it male or female. Ultimately, these stereotypes provide the justification for Islamophobic attacks against veiled Muslim women as a means of responding to the multiple 'threats' of the veil as a symbol of gender inequality, self-segregation and Islamist terrorism.

Interestingly, when the focus of Chapter Two turned to a consideration of the meanings of the veil from the perspective of Muslim women themselves, it became evident that the veil signals a 'different' identity but this identity is not necessarily 'oppressed', 'isolated' or 'fundamentalist'. The research literature indicated that Muslim women choose to wear the veil as an expression of their commitment to *Allah* and for the benefits and advantages – perceived or experienced – which come from wearing it, namely, a sense of religious piety, public modesty and protection from the male gaze. However, both colonial and contemporary stereotypical understandings of the veil foster Islamophobia whereby Islam is depicted as

a backward and misogynistic religion, Muslim women as oppressed and dangerous, and Muslim men as barbaric and violent.

Chapter Three suggested that there are gendered dimensions to manifestations of Islamophobia in the public sphere. Within this paradigm, the gendered dimensions of Islamophobic victimisation are premised on five different, yet interrelated, arguments. First, stereotypes of veiled Muslim women as passive and oppressed render them 'easy' and 'soft' targets to attack because of their perceived powerlessness. Secondly, despite the (actual or perceived) degree of agency of the wearer, the visibility of the veil in public provokes public manifestations of Islamophobia by virtue of its symbolism as a sign of self-segregation. Thirdly, in light of their perceived sexual non-availability, the 'refusal' of veiled Muslim women to conform to the expectation of being 'the object of the public gaze' challenges gender relations in the public sphere. As a result, veiled Muslim women may be attacked for failing to conform to Western expectations of how women should dress and behave in the public sphere.

Fourthly, the image of the veiled Muslim woman represents 'Islam', the religion of the perpetrators of the terror attacks of 9/11 and 7/7. In this sense, veiled Muslim women are seen as 'responsible' for the actions of the terrorists. Therefore, attacks towards veil wearing women are justified because of the conflation of Islam with terrorism. Finally, veiled Muslim women may be targeted because they are seen as more visually 'threatening' than Muslim men on the basis that their Muslim identity cannot be mistaken, denied, or concealed. Ultimately, the wearing of the veil marks Muslim women more readily visible as 'soft', 'easy', 'convenient' and 'appropriate' targets to attack when they are seen in public. Unarguably, an increased awareness of the gendered facets of Islamophobia unveils the targeted – yet hidden, often 'invisible' – victimisation of veiled Muslim women in public places in the UK and elsewhere in the West.

Using the city of Leicester as the research case-study area, the study employed a qualitative framework in order to shed light on the experiences of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia in public. As discussed in Chapter Four, the methodology included individual and focus group interviews with veiled Muslim women, individual interviews with local key

stakeholders and policy-makers, and ethnography. Qualitative interviewing provided important insight into the individual and collective experiences of Islamophobic abuse suffered by veiled Muslim women, and a greater understanding of the context and meanings associated with it. The use of verbatim quotations from research participants was important for voicing their views and attitudes whilst conducting ethnography fostered a better understanding of their lived experiences. Violence against veiled Muslim women is a multi-faceted phenomenon, occurring within a social context that is influenced by notions of religion, gender, identity and 'difference'. It would be difficult to understand victims' experiences in a quantitative manner, divorced from their context.

A qualitative analysis of the findings facilitated the exploration of themes that would have remained peripheral had the study relied on a quantitative approach such as the interesectionality of victims' multiple identities, previous experiences of racism and the significance of space, place and type of veiling in terms of victims' vulnerability to Islamophobic attacks, to name but some. Chapter Four also discussed the role of the researcher as an 'insider' or 'outsider'. It was argued that being an outsider can benefit the research process (rather than obstructing it) by enabling the researcher to elicit detailed and in-depth responses, ask comprehensive interview questions and minimise participants' fear of being judged whilst maintaining a critical distance from the interview data.

However, it is important to acknowledge issues that have been outside the parameters of this study. First, the study made limited use of the stakeholder interview data within the analysis chapters. As explained in Chapter Four, I deliberately limited my discussions with stakeholders in order to allow for the 'lost' voices of veiled Muslim women to be 'heard'. Secondly, the research did not speak to perpetrators. Although this aspect was deliberately excluded from the parameters of this study, it is evident that we do not actually know the motivations that drove the perpetrators to commit the acts that they did. Rather, we have to rely on victims' testimony in order to draw conclusions about offenders' motivations. Finally, a further limitation of the study is the fact that my sample of Muslim women happened to be Muslim women who, by and large, chose to wear the veil. The fact that there

are Muslim women who are forced to wear the veil does not mean that there are not Muslim women who are acting out of choice. Certainly, my sample does not cover the full spectrum of views and experiences that might be held by veiled Muslim women and therefore it is not representative of the values, feelings and experiences of all veiled Muslim women. However, it does cover the choices, opinions and experiences of those Muslim women who choose to wear the veil. Collectively, these limitations do not undermine the significance of the study but it is clear that future research should explore them in more depth.

8.3 Assessing the scale of the problem

The analysis began in Chapter Five with an examination of the meanings of the veil from the perspective of veiled Muslim women themselves. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, popular perceptions stereotypically read the veil as a homogeneous practice thus failing to recognise the multiple and overlapping understandings that it holds for women who choose to wear it, whist the voices of veiled Muslim women are missing from political, media and public debates. Importantly, Chapter Five challenged the symbolism of the veil as a 'threat' to notions of gender oppression, national cohesion and public safety, and illustrated the more nuanced meanings that it holds for veil wearers. The chapter indicated that the veil contains a two-fold dimension: a religious dimension and a gender-related one. From a religious perspective, participants described the veil as a symbol of religious commitment, worship and piety. In essence, the wearing of the veil was understood as something that *Allah* had asked them to do. Seen in this context the practice of veiling demonstrates veiled Muslim women's conformity and devotion to *Allah*'s commandments.

From a gender perspective, being fully veiled provided participants with a sense of protection from sexual harassment whilst the anonymity conferred less of a chance of undesirable male attention when in public. In addition, participants described the wearing of the veil as 'liberating' and 'empowering' in the sense that it allowed them to leave the house without worrying about being judged based on their physical appearance. Moreover, throughout individual and focus group interviews the consensus view was that the

wearing of the veil was an act of choice, and this was something that participants were keen to highlight. As an expression of personal choice, religious identity and freedom of expression, veiling plays a crucial role to being recognised as Muslim, particularly in the West. At the same time though, and as subsequent chapters highlighted, the visibility of the veil is key to triggering Islamophobic attacks towards Muslim women when they are seen in public places.

Indeed, and as discussed in Chapter Six, most participants felt that it was their distinctive Muslim appearance that made them a target. As such, the wearing of the veil made them identifiable as Muslims and as a result the abuse that they suffered in public was a direct implication of the visibility of their 'Muslimness'. When asked to describe the nature of victimisation experienced, participants suggested that the most common forms of Islamophobic victimisation were what are typically described as minor, 'low-level' types of harassment. This includes verbal abuse (such as name-calling, swearing and threats of physical violence), persistent staring, and a sense of being avoided by people. Nonetheless, in addition to these types of problems, some participants had experienced what would appear to be more serious forms of Islamophobic victimisation such as actual or attempted physical assaults, stone-throwing, and even incidents where passing vehicles attempted to run them over.

In terms of its frequency, experiences of Islamophobic victimisation were rarely 'one-off' incidents, but instead part of a broader continuum of Islamophobia experienced by veiled Muslim women in public. At the same time though, Islamophobic incidents were often regarded as 'normal' by the majority of participants on the basis that this type of intimidation was an everyday occurrence and as a result they had become 'used to it', mainly as a means of adjusting to or rationalising Islamophobic behaviour. In this sense, participants painted a picture of multiple and repeat victimisation over the course of their lives to the extent that it had become commonplace and 'natural' for them. Consequently, Islamophobic victimisation had come to be expected – and accepted – as an intrinsic part of their lives in the UK.

The findings revealed that this victimisation had significant psychological and behavioural effects for veiled Muslim women, their families

and wider Muslim communities. For example, psychological impacts included feelings of depression, sadness, shame and guilt, as well as a reduction in confidence and self-esteem. Also, incidents of Islamophobic victimisation increased feelings of insecurity, vulnerability and fear amongst participants. Equally worryingly, participants referred to their sense of perpetual anxiety, which was found to derive from the fear of future victimisation as well as from the struggle to cope with the cycle of existing, everyday 'low-level' abuse. As a result, the threat of Islamophobic abuse had long-lasting effects for actual and potential victims including making them afraid to step out of their 'comfort zone'.

Correspondingly, the majority of participants had altered their lifestyle with the aim to reduce the risk of future attacks. Some participants mentioned 'no-go areas' where they would face an increased risk of abuse whilst others restricted their public travel to a minimum. Additional behavioural impacts included the desire to avoid leaving the house, as this provided them with immutability from being attacked in public. At the same time though, some participants reported feeling like 'prisoners in their own home'. As a last resort, several participants tried to conceal their Muslim identity through removing the veils in specific or all public places.

As expected, the reality of Islamophobic victimisation seriously damaged the quality of life for veiled Muslim women's families, who often witnessed their mother, sister or wife getting physically or verbally abused in public by virtue of the visibility of her Muslim identity. The findings also illustrated that manifestations of Islamophobia towards veiled Muslim women were perceived as an attack upon the fabric of the Muslim community itself. From this perspective, Islamophobic victimisation was understood as a 'message crime' on the basis that 'an attack on one Muslim is an attack on all'. Essentially, 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. At the same time though, Islamophobic victimisation also affects the wider society because it undermines the fundamental values of liberal democratic states: the issues of choice, religious freedom and freedom of expression.

8.4 A framework for understanding the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women

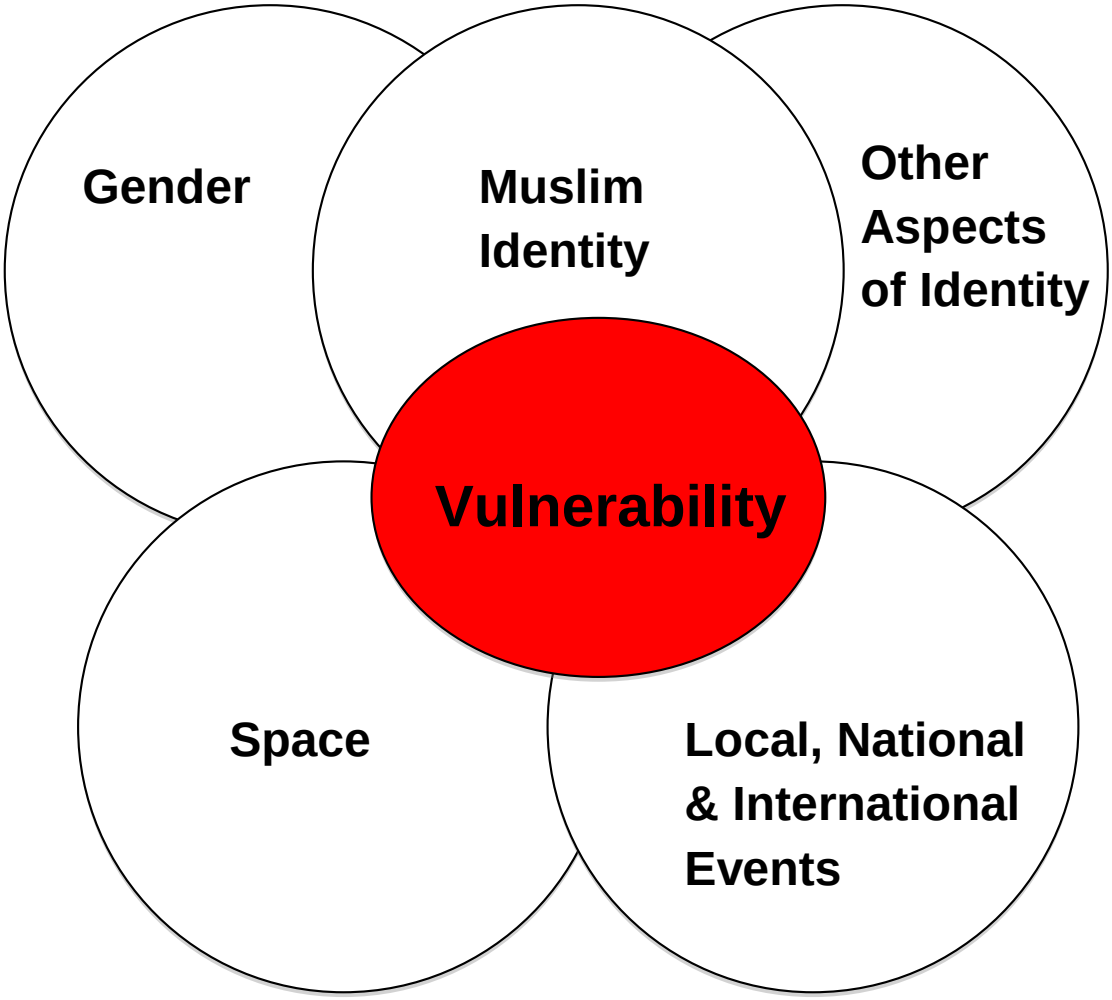
As we have seen from the research findings discussed thus far, veiled Muslim women are likely to be victimised in public because of their affiliation with Islam, a religion and culture that is routinely associated with negative stereotypes, attitudes and perceptions. However, in addition to their Muslim identity, veiled Muslim women have many other identities interwoven together including gender, age, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status (to name but some) which interact together. The interplay amongst these identities render veiled Muslim women even more susceptible to being perceived as an 'appropriate' victim. Correspondingly, the research findings revealed that veiled Muslim women are likely to be systematically and repeatedly attacked because of the visibility of their Muslim identity whilst signs of visible, perceived 'weaknesses' such as physical disabilities, mental health problems, language difficulties, physical shape and size, also heighten their vulnerability and increase the risk of being attacked when they are seen in public. This infers that the perpetrators exploit perceived disadvantages stemming from the victims' group membership (such as perceived gender oppression in Islam) but also individual victim vulnerabilities (such as being elderly or disabled).

Indeed, and as discussed in Chapter Six, age was often highlighted by both young and older participants as an intersectional factor which contributed negatively to how Islamophobic victimisation was experienced. The veiled Muslim women who were very young or very old felt more vulnerable and thus more fearful of being attacked in public. Also, the findings from focus group interviews revealed that the disabled participants felt more fearful of becoming victims of Islamophobia in comparison to the non-disabled participants. As a result, they tried to conceal their disability where possible in order to minimise the risk of future victimisation. Anisa, a participant who was partially sighted, chose to wear an eye veil – that is, an extra layer of veil which covers the eyes – in order to conceal her disability although this made it even more difficult for her to see in public. Moreover, the research findings illustrated that there is considerable intersectionality amongst race, ethnicity and Islamophobia. For example, the black and Asian

Muslim women who took part in this study revealed that they were often subjected to verbal abuse which indicated racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic prejudice whilst the white Muslim women who took part in the study felt that they have been attacked because they were white, British and Muslim.

Equally importantly, the research findings demonstrated that location is another significant factor that makes veiled Muslim women more or less vulnerable to Islamophobic victimisation in public. For example, participants argued that their sense of vulnerability was lower in areas with a large Muslim population whereas in areas where the Muslim population was rather small, they felt a heightened sense of vulnerability to Islamophobic victimisation. Consequently, some participants tried to avoid visiting 'white' areas where they would mix with non-Muslims (although this was not always possible in practice). With this in mind, Figure 1 shows that the perceived and actual vulnerability of veiled Muslim women to Islamophobic attacks in public places depends upon the visibility of their Muslim identity coupled with the visibility of 'other' aspects of their identity in parallel with other situational factors.

Figure 1: A model of vulnerability of veiled Muslim women in public



In line with the research framework outlined in Chapter Four, this model of vulnerability of veiled Muslim women in public places has evolved as a result of a grounded theoretical approach. In light of the testimonies of research participants in this particular study, it is important to move beyond the data in order to postulate a theoretical model to help to account for their experiences of Islamophobic victimisation in public places. According to Figure 1, the likelihood that a veiled Muslim woman will suffer Islamophobic victimisation depends heavily upon the intersections of religion, gender, identity, space as well as media reports of local, national and international events related to Islam, Muslims and the veil. Within this framework for Islamophobic victimisation to occur, several conditions must be met. First, the prime actors

– the offender and the victim – must intersect in time and space. Secondly, the victim must be perceived by the offender as an 'easy' target to attack so that the perpetrator feels that he or she can 'get away with it'. Thirdly, the victim must be seen as 'deserving' the abuse so that the attack is justified, at least in the mind of the perpetrator.

Although it is important to recognise that the practice of veiling is *the* dominant motivating factor from a victim perspective, it is likely that the wearing of the veil in its own right does not necessarily make a Muslim woman vulnerable. Rather, it is how this identity intersects with other aspects of this woman's identity, such as being visibly disabled or elderly, and how this identity intersects with other situational factors that make her vulnerable in the eyes of the perpetrator. This intersection provides the perpetrator with the ability to attack veiled Muslim women in public. Indeed, and as discussed in Chapter Six, the notion of intersectionality of identities shows that veiled Muslim women may be targeted not just for their group membership but because they are stereotypically perceived as 'soft', 'easy' or 'convenient' targets by virtue of the fact that they are visibly 'different' (through markers of dress, skin colour or language) and because they seem vulnerable (because of their gender, age, disability or physical presence) in certain spaces and places. At the same time, Islamophobic media reports of local, national or international events related to Islam, Muslims and the veil – such as the veil ban in France, Belgium and Italy or the murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich in May 2013 – increase public hostility towards veiled Muslim women when they are seen in public, particularly in spaces and places with a less established practising Muslim population. The intersection of these variables provides the perpetrator with the ability to attack veiled Muslim women in public.

This approach ties in with the suggestions of Chakraborti and Garland (2012) who suggested that perceived vulnerability and 'difference', rather than identity and group membership alone can be targeted by perpetrators of hate crime. They propose that the intersections between a range of identity characteristics – including religion, gender, age, ethnicity, race, disability, mental health, bodily shape and appearance – are relevant factors in the commission of hate offences. This infers that the likelihood of being targeted is determined by the presence of factors that are separate from an

individual's 'main' identity characteristic. Such a view highlights the relevance of obvious disadvantages to the process of victim selection. Within the context of this study participants were aware that their experiences of victimisation were attributable primarily to their Muslim identity but also to their perceived vulnerabilities and 'difference', whilst specific spaces and places as well as media coverage also affected the likelihood of being subjected to Islamophobic victimisation.

As Chakraborti and Garland (2012) observe in the context of hate crime, there are particular spaces and places that intensify veiled Muslim women's vulnerability. The present study shows that veiled Muslim women feel vulnerable to Islamophobic attacks even within a multicultural city such as Leicester or even within a Muslim-dominated area such as Highfields in Leicester. As I learned from the ethnographic element of the research, although Leicester is commonly perceived as a successful multicultural city, it is not immune from Islamophobia. Indeed, throughout interviews and focus group discussions participants highlighted that the level of abuse that they suffered depended upon whether they were in their local community or whether they left their 'comfort zone', sometimes taking the bus to go to less familiar areas that did not accommodate 'difference' and Muslim 'otherness' in particular. For example, they referred to 'no-go zones' for Muslims in Leicester such as the traditionally 'white' areas of Braunstone, Beaumont Leys, Saffron Lane, New Park, Hamilton and even Leicester city centre where they would mix with non-Muslim residents or visitors to Leicester. Initially, participants saw Leicester as a place where they would be safe to practise their religion through veiling, and this was the main reason why they had decided to move to Leicester.

In hindsight, it is clear that there are certain spaces and places – even in such a multicultural city such as Leicester – where veiled Muslim women might be at a heightened risk of attack and thus feeling more vulnerable. In this regard, it is not necessarily location and fixed physical geography that makes veiled Muslim women especially vulnerable. Rather, it is the multiple spaces and the multiple places that increase their vulnerability to Islamophobic attacks, even within a Muslim-dominated community. As Perry and Alvi (2012) point out, the reality of Islamophobia creates 'invisible' social

and geographical boundaries, across which members of the Muslim community are not 'welcome' to step. The enactment of physical, geographical boundaries impacts upon 'emotional geographies' in relation to the way in which Muslims perceive the spaces and places around and outside their communities of abode. Rather than risk the threat of being attacked, both verbally and physically, actual and potential victims opt to retreat to 'their own' communities.

Importantly, the framework presented in Figure 1 has particular significance, both in drawing attention to the dynamics which contribute to the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women and the process of victim selection, and in painting a more complete picture of the lived realities of Islamophobic victimisation in public. In addition, the significance of this model is that it is not only relevant to this particular study. Rather, we can apply these variables to other forms of hate crime victims. Indeed, this model can be used to explain the victimisation and vulnerability of other targets of hate. This infers that there are parallels here with other forms of targeted violence such as gypsies and traveller communities, asylum seekers and refugees, as well as new migrant communities, to name but some examples. However, it is important to note that for the purposes of this particular study, the relevance of gender is implicit because it is only women who wear the veil. Ultimately, this analytic framework provides an important comment on how hate crime victimisation can be better understood as a consequence of this study.

8.5 Moving forwards

Chapter Seven considered the ways in which participants coped with Islamophobic victimisation. The research findings highlighted that there are two main, yet contrasting, potential responses – passivity and resistance. For example, some participants ignored the abuse because they saw this as the easiest, and certainly the least inflammatory, method of dealing with this victimisation. The commonality of this form of victimisation coupled with a sense of fear of escalating violence had prompted several participants to either ignore it or dismiss it as 'not serious'. However, not all victims of Islamophobic abuse reacted in such a way. Some participants tried to

engage with their abusers in order to 'educate' them about Islam and the veil. Others, meanwhile, chose to stand up to their abusers, or indeed to retaliate against their Islamophobic behaviour. In most cases, retaliation took the form of verbal abuse, and, at times, of physical abuse. These participants stated that they felt less victimised because they had not internalised any feelings of anger, sadness, shame or guilt.

Chapter Seven also examined the availability and effectiveness of services from the perspective of both victims and service providers. During the course of interviews and focus group discussions with veiled Muslim women, it became clear that they had received very little support from official organisations. Rather, family and friends served as a primary source of emotional and practical support. Although local key stakeholders and policy-makers recognised the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia, they felt that there was little they could do because victims did not report their experiences, as exemplified by the following comments.

> *If victims don't report the crime, how do we know that the problem exists? If the government, if the council are going to do something about it, the first thing they will say is 'Where is the evidence?'*
>
> Community Cohesion officer, Leicestershire County Council

> *We need victims to report the crime first. That's our problem. Muslim women do not report it. But we've done it in cases of domestic violence. More victims come forward now than they've ever done historically so we can do it in relation to this sort of anti-Muslim hostility but we need victims to report it first.*
>
> Senior Crown Prosecutor, CPS, Leicester

> *I want to see a rise in anti-Muslim hate crime because that would suggest to me that we have got increased levels of confidence with the [Muslim] community. So an actual increase would concern me but I wouldn't think it was necessarily a failure.*
>
> Police Chief Inspector, Leicester

However, the veiled Muslim women who took part in the study highlighted considerable challenges to reporting their victimisation experiences. As such, there were a variety of reasons why victims chose not to report including a lack of confidence in the police and criminal justice system, victims' perceptions that the police would not take it seriously or would treat them insensitively, and that the incident was too trivial. In addition, participants felt that reporting their victimisation experiences to an agency other than the police was a relatively futile exercise, as other organisations were seen as lacking the authority to deal with this type of victimisation. At the same time, there was a lack of confidence amongst participants about the nature and quality of support available from mainstream victim services such as Victim Support. Moreover, some participants stated that they did not have any knowledge of Victim Support and its services. The services provided by national Muslim organisations, such as Muslim Women's Helpline, the MAMA project and the Forum against Islamophobia and Racism, were seen as relatively useful but only a small minority of participants were aware of, or had made use of, these services.

The research findings highlighted that there was no formal support in place for Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia in the local Muslim community, which, it could be argued, served to worsen the difficulties faced by actual and potential victims. Moreover, it would seem that a 'no Islamophobia here' mentality was commonplace in the Muslim community in Leicester, and this is something that I encountered whilst conducting the focus group interviews in local mosques, Islamic centres and Islamic educational institutions. Clearly, there is an ideology that encourages veiled Muslim women to remain silent about their experiences of Islamophobia. Equally worryingly, the exclusion of women from specific local mosques prevented third-party reporting techniques. This is a shame because for those individuals who might not feel comfortable or confident enough to report their experiences to the police, speaking to their local imam might be the only way for victims to report their victimisation experiences or to access support. As James and Simmonds (2013) point out, third-party reporting is important in building trust in communities and increasing the reporting of hate

crimes and incidents because it recognises that victims of hate crime may lack confidence in reporting their experiences to local police forces.

Although most participants felt that there was little that could be done to resolve the problem of under-reporting, some argued that this situation demanded taking steps to increase the confidence of victims and witnesses to report Islamophobic incidents. In this regard it was suggested that the police should employ strategies that will improve public confidence such as engaging with veiled Muslim women in a religious and culturally sensitive manner. For example, participants found it challenging to engage with male police officers, or with police officers (either female or male) who were dismissive or ignorant of their needs as followers of Islam. In this context it is necessary for the police, and for service providers more generally, to receive relevant training on ways to provide high-quality services that meet the religious and cultural needs of veiled Muslim women. It is also important to provide adequate language services for recent immigrants who do not speak English because a language barrier can make the provision of services much more difficult. Existing physical disabilities and mental health problems should also be taken into account when dealing with victims of Islamophobia.

Moreover, it is necessary that both policy makers and criminal justice practitioners understand the diversity within the Muslim population which covers ethnicity, nationality and theology but most importantly, gender. Services need to be flexible to meet the needs of veiled Muslim women and these differ considerably from those of Muslim men who have suffered Islamophobic victimisation. For example, access to female staff members is an important need for some veiled Muslim women who will not otherwise access services. Similarly, the option of home visits by female police officers and support workers should be made available to veiled Muslim women who have been victims of Islamophobia. Additionally, while it is important that support service providers working with victims of Islamophobia recognise both the principles of the religion and the specific cultural backgrounds of those with whom they are working, it is also crucial that sensitivity does not stop there. Support service providers should develop the capacity and flexibility within their programmes to allow repeat victims to return to the organisation for additional and continued support. In cases where victims'

needs are not fully recognised, a lack of appropriate support can add to the injury inflicted on the victim. Finally, it is necessary that service providers take steps in order to raise awareness about the services that they offer, and this could be done through engagement with veiled Muslim women themselves rather than through gatekeepers. As we have seen, gatekeepers do not always reflect the views and experiences of veiled Muslim women; rather, they often foster a 'no Islamophobia here' attitude whereby this problem is 'brushed under the carpet'.

On the one hand, reforms must be made within mainstream organisations to provide actual and potential victims with a more accessible and effective mechanism of reporting and of receiving support. On the other hand, change should also come from the Muslim community itself. Islamophobic victimisation – in line with other sensitive issues such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, drugs and alcohol addiction – is not discussed openly within the Muslim community, which can only serve to increase victims' alienation and vulnerability. Ultimately, a lack of religious and culturally sensitive support services available to veiled Muslim women by conventional support services in parallel with the culture of taboo and shame that surround sensitive issues within the Muslim community together prevent victims from seeking help and thus they suffer in silence.

Against this background, the study has made a unique contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the targeted victimisation of veiled Muslim women. Accordingly, the study has informed hate crime scholarship in a number of ways. First, it identified the unique experiences of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia that had not been evidenced by previous studies. To this date, this has been the only study in the UK that focused on the experiences of Muslim women who wear the *niqab* as victims of Islamophobia in public. Importantly, the study has informed knowledge of the nature and impact of this victimisation upon veiled Muslim women, their families and wider Muslim communities. In addition, the study has explored the immediate responses of veiled Muslim women to this victimisation and revealed that their passivity to such incidents reflects their commitment to their religion and its moral codes of humble behaviour, and is therefore an act

of agency, rather than a reflection of their perceived gender oppression and passivity.

Moreover, the study has demonstrated that veiled Muslim women tend to cope with this victimisation via their own support networks, rather than turning to official organisations, whom they either do not trust or are not aware of. Finally, the thesis has provided an innovative analytic framework for understanding the complex impact of intersectionality on the vulnerability of veiled Muslim women. Indeed, the framework presented in Figure 1 can be used by academics, policy-makers and criminal justice practitioners seeking to understand and respond to the needs of veiled Muslim women as actual and potential victims of Islamophobia. As discussed in Chapter Six, the current 'one size fits all approach' is potentially flawed for veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia because it does not take into consideration the intersectionality of victims' identities, nor the fact that veiled Muslim women may be more vulnerable in particular spaces and places, especially in the aftermath of Islamophobic media reports of events related to Islam, Muslims and the veil. In light of this, it is hoped that there will be a growth in the quantity and quality of research conducted into the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia. Only by listening to their voices – and learning about their views, feelings and experiences – can we begin to address both their vulnerabilities and their 'invisibility' to the criminal justice system and society as a whole.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1. Demographics in Leicester according to the 2011 Census 240

Appendix 2. Semi-Structured Interview and Focus Group Schedule for Veiled Muslim Women 241

Appendix 3. Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Agency Representatives 242

Appendix 4. Consent Form 243

Appendix 5. Participant Information Sheet 244

Appendix 6. Demographics Section for Veiled Muslim Women 247

Appendix One

Demographics in Leicester according to the 2011 Census

Figure 2: Broad ethnic groups in Leicester in 2011

(Leicester City Council, 2014a)

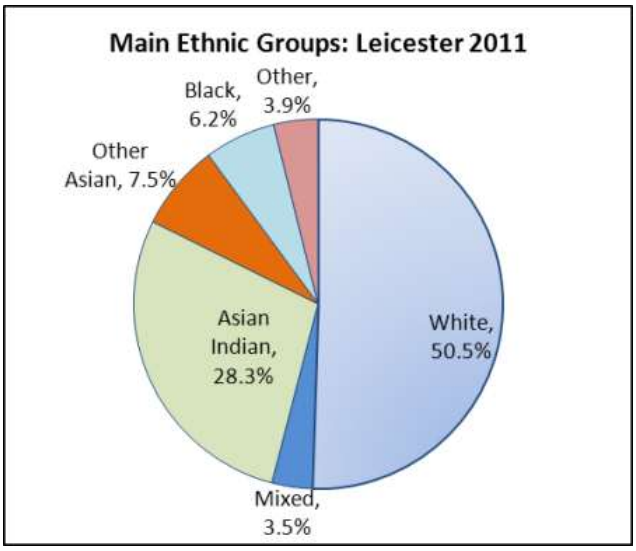
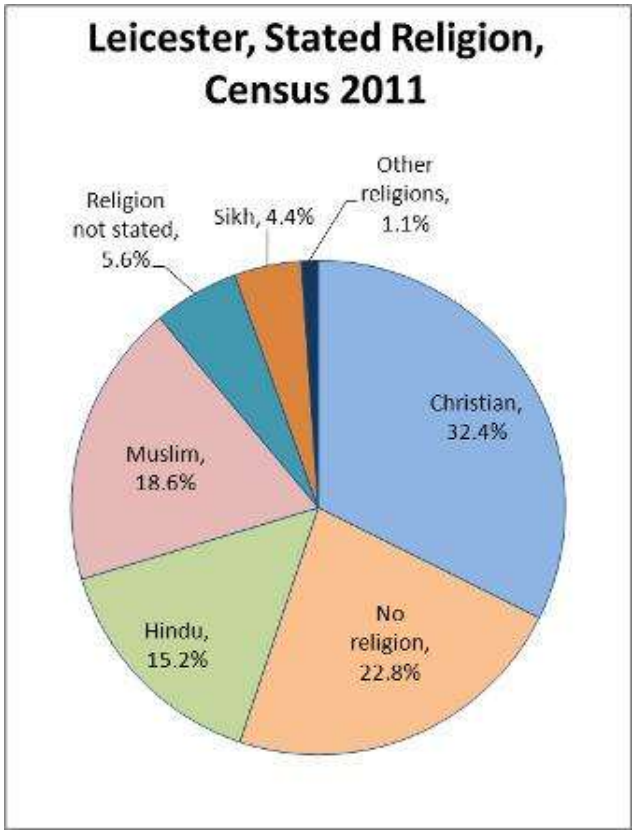


Figure 3: Broad religious groups in Leicester in 2011

(Leicester City Council, 2014b)



Appendix Two

Semi-Structured Interview and Focus Group Schedule for Veiled Muslim Women

- When did you start wearing the *niqab*?
- What does the *niqab* mean to you?

- Have you heard of the term Islamophobia? How would you describe it?
- When you are out and about, has anyone said or done anything in relation to your *niqab* that has made you feel uncomfortable?
- If yes, how often would you say that this happens?
- Can you give me some examples of the hostility that you have experienced?
- Have you experienced any form of racism prior to wearing the *niqab*?
- How would you describe the average person that harasses you in public (for example, in terms of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion or social class)?
- In your view, why are women who wear the *niqab* harassed by people in public?

- What is the impact of these incidents on you?
- In what ways does it affect your family?
- In your view, how does it affect the Muslim community?

- How do you cope with such incidents?
- Which safety measures would you say you take when you are out and about?

- Have you reported any of these incidents to the police? If not, why?
- What would you like to see in place in terms of police service?
- Is there any kind of support from an organisation or from anyone else?
- What would you like to see in place in terms of official support?

- In France and Belgium, it is currently illegal for women to wear the *niqab* in public. What is your view on this law?
- How would you respond to a similar ban in this country?

- In your view, what is the solution to the problem of Islamophobia?

Appendix Three

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

for Agency Representatives

- Can you tell me about your organisation and your role within the organisation?

- How many incidents of Islamophobic victimisation approximately have been reported to your organisation this year?
- What strategies are in place within your organisation to address this problem?
- How do you respond to veiled Muslim women who have experienced Islamophobic victimisation?
- Is the service designed to cater for the needs of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia? How?

- Are you aware of other agencies designed to address this problem?
- What is your opinion on your agency' s, and other agencies', responses to victims of Islamophobic victimisation?
- What, if anything, needs to be done to improve the existing level of service provision afforded to veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia?

Appendix Four

Consent Form

Project Title **Unveiling Islamophobia: The victimisation of veiled Muslim women**

Name, position and contact address of researcher: Irene Zempi; PhD student; University of Leicester, Department of Criminology, The Friars, 154 Upper New Walk, Leicester, LE1 7QA, UK; Tel: 0116 252 5781 or 07786421372; E-mail: ez15@le.ac.uk

Please tick box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐

3. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Please tick box

	Yes	No
4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded.	☐	☐
5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.	☐	☐

_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant Date Signature

Appendix Five

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title **Unveiling Islamophobia: The victimisation of veiled Muslim women**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

My name is Irene Zempi and I am a PhD student at the University of Leicester, supervised by Dr Neil Chakraborti and Mr Jon Garland. This research is exploring experiences in Islamophobic victimisation of Muslim women who wear the niqab (face covering) in public places in Leicester. The main aims of the research are:

- To identify the nature of Islamophobic victimisation directed towards veiled Muslim women in public places in Leicester and elsewhere
- To explore the impact of this victimisation upon veiled Muslim women, their families and wider Muslim communities
- To determine the factors that constrain or facilitate the reporting of this victimisation
- To determine the coping strategies which are used by victims and their families in response to their experiences of Islamophobia

2. Why have I been chosen?

I would like to speak with veiled Muslim women who have experienced incidents of Islamophobic victimisation in public places in Leicester and elsewhere.

3. What will happen to me if I take part?

Your involvement in the study would be to take part in an individual or group interview where we discuss your experiences of Islamophobic victimisation and the ways in which this victimisation has affected your life. The interview will probably last between 1 hour to 1 ½ hours depending on how much time you have available, and how much information you want to share.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. You do not have to give your real name. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep. You will also be asked to sign a consent form and provided with a copy of this. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time (prior to the publication of the study) and without giving a reason.

4. If I want to take part, what will happen next?
If you decide you want to take part in this study, you can contact me, Irene Zempi. You can contact me by text or phone on my mobile 07786421372 or by email on ez15@le.ac.uk. You can also find out more information about this study on: http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/criminology/people/irene-zempi.

I will explain what the research is about, what will be involved in the interview process and I can also answer any questions you might have. You can then decide if you want to go ahead with the interview and we can arrange a suitable time and location.

5. Will taking part in this study be kept confidential?
All information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. The only contact information required will be either a mobile telephone number or an email address. All interview recordings will be destroyed at the end of the research. Your name and any personal contact details will not be recorded on the interview transcripts. In addition, any details which potentially could identify you will also be removed or changed. My academic supervisors (listed in section 8) will have access to the anonymised transcripts of your interview, but I will be the only person to have access to the original recordings of the interview, your consent form and any of your contact details.

Your participation in this study will not be discussed with other interviewees. Your name will be changed in the study and I will ensure that your involvement remains entirely confidential and anonymous.

6. What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results of the study will be used in my PhD thesis. The material will be presented at academic and professional conferences and in academic journals. Anonymity and confidentiality will still be in place in all cases. Findings from this study will contribute to raising awareness about the problem of Islamophobia and to developing a better understanding of ways to improve the service offered to Muslim women who have suffered this type of abuse.

7. Who is organising and funding the research?
The study is based at the University of Leicester. It is funded by the University of Leicester.

8. Contact for further information

Irene Zempi
Tel: 0116 252 5781 Mobile: 07786421372
Email: ez15@le.ac.uk
Website: http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/criminology/people/irene-zempi

Academic Supervisors

Dr Neil Chakraborti
Tel: 0116 252 5706
Email: nac5@leicester.ac.uk

Mr Jon Garland
Tel: 0116 252 5701
Email: jgd@leicester.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this information sheet, and if it is possible, participating in the study.

Appendix Six

Demographics Section for Veiled Muslim Women

Please state the following:

1. **What is your age?**

2. **What is your ethnic group (as defined in the 2011 Census)?**

White British	
White Irish	
Any other White background (please state)	
White and Black Caribbean	
White and Black African	
White and Asian	
Any other Mixed background (please state)	
Asian or Asian British Indian	
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	
Any other Asian background (please state)	
Black or Black British Caribbean	
Black or Black British African	
Any other Black background (please state)	
Chinese	
Other ethnic group (please state)	

3. **What is your religious background?**

Born into a Muslim family	
Converted to Islam	

4. **How long have you lived in Leicester for**?

1 year or less	
2-5 years	
5 or more	

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