



BRITISH MUSLIMS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT



HIJAB, MEANING, IDENTITY,
OTHERIZATION AND POLITICS:
BRITISH MUSLIM WOMEN



SAIED R. AMELI
ARZU MERALI

ISLAMIC HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION



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FOREWORD

This volume of the British Muslims' Expectations series takes a look at the Hijab – commonly understood as a head-covering for women - and the expectations of those Muslim women who wear it and the Muslim men and women who profess strong affiliation to it. The wearing of Hijab impacts on so many human rights issues both practical and philosophical and has much currency given recent events. It became a natural and topical choice to tease out both current problems with official policy vis Muslims but also to problematise the assumptions that have generated that policy.

In articulating their expectations from the government regarding this increasingly contentious phenomenon, we inevitably have to address the infringements of the rights of those who wear it, but also their vilification and the vilification of those who believe in the practice or support it – whatever their opinion.

Emancipation means many things to many people. The struggle for women's emancipation is best known as that which gained momentum in the West in the last two centuries and has formed the basis of most academic literature and underlies popular notions of gender equality and egalitarianism.

The right to religious expression and practice, the right to education and work, freedom from discrimination – and the rights of majority and minority women to all of these, form part of the lexicon of human rights formulated and mainly codified after the Second World War. One would not expect that these two trends would run counter to each other or would effect the opposite than that proposed. Yet sadly, at the beginning of the 21st century of the common era this is the exact case. Anti-Hijab policy is often expressed as the benign attempts of government to protect Muslim women's rights – despite Muslim women's own expectations and desires. Support for or the choice to wear Hijab is portrayed as the failure of Muslim women to long for the liberation that in all honesty still eludes women world-wide.

If we are to work towards a truly egalitarian society we need to have the courage to problematise and interrogate our conceptions of each other and what motivates us. Whilst this is a two-way project, it is currently Muslims who feel the very public pressure to change their concepts and practices, rather than to be engaged as to why their concepts and practices are meaningful and important to them as individuals and communities, but also for society as a whole. Without that engagement any number of policies and measures whether forced through law or coerced through strategy will have little or no effect on the community it targets and will only serve to oppress those it claims to benefit.

Islamic Human Rights Commission

INTRODUCTION

The rights of Muslim women to work, education, religious expression and freedom from discrimination should be guaranteed in a world that claims to refer to international human rights norms that in their most symbolic document – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – claimed equality for all. Feminist critiques of human rights discourse have frequently noted that equality initially extended (arguably inadvertently) to men, and even its leading proponent Eleanor Roosevelt differentiated in their application between men and women. This differentiation is one that subsequent human rights instruments and documents, in particular the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the high profile Beijing Platform for Action, have sought to address. According to the United Nations Department for the Development of Women (UNIFEM):

“Women’s Rights are Human Rights”¹

Sadly, UNIFEM’s remit is the developing world and its focus on women’s rights exhibits the common assumption that women in the developed world have somehow reached or are very near reaching equality and that liberation is already theirs – a model to be emulated and indeed engineered onto the rest of the world. The Hijab has become symbolic in this assumption, of both cause and effect of Muslim women’s subjugation by religious patriarchy, often with reference to the history of veiling in pre-Enlightenment Christian societies.

This report does not set out to polemicise a pro-Hijab stance. It seeks instead to articulate the words of Muslim women who wear Hijab, the responses of those men and women who affiliate to the concept of Hijab within the broader context of our survey work on citizenship as well as the views of Muslim men on Hijab for both women and men. In so doing the authors seek to evaluate how these views have been reflected or not as the case may be in current literature and policy, and how where there is lack there should be integration.

There is much Islamic literature both jurisprudential and motivational that discusses the necessity and necessities of wearing Hijab, the conditions pertaining to it and the Qu’ranic and Hadith² justifications of the practice and other philosophical debates pertaining to its observance. This report will later allude to the significant and diverse literature on this subject, suffice to state at this stage that according to the vast majority of scholars of Islam, Hijab as it pertains to women is stated to be compulsory for all women when they reach puberty (the precise age or way of assessing this differs from schools of thought). It is usually described as bringing ‘beauty’ and ‘peace’ for women and society. As well as being a matter of personal piety and religious observance, Hijab is often considered in religious literature to have structural value and societies with or without Hijab are thought to have vastly different structures, values and social environments.

As a result of these views, Hijab clearly plays a symbolic and constructive role,

1

www.unifem.org UNIFEM website, 1997

2

Prophetic traditions, the sunnah, which form the second base of Islamic law and practice with the Qu’ran.

it is a phenomena which is not only related to women but to men (as will be discussed later), and spans generations. Its interrelatedness with culture and society decodes many values and maybe this is why in some sense Hijab in some cases becomes a 'wholistic symbol' reflected in the statement: Hijab is equal to all values and all values are equal to Hijab. This may explain why it becomes so important for many Muslim Women.

This report initially focuses on and seeks to develop through interviews an understanding of the views of Muslim women in this country as to why they believe they need to wear Hijab. Their needs and expectations are the decisive factor in assessing whether their rights have been met or breached and by whom these rights or their lack have been effected.

In so doing, this report begins by using Hijab as shorthand for any type of head-covering of Muslim women worn for religious reasons. This ranges from a sometime small piece of cloth that symbolically covers part of the hair to full length robes and even face coverings. This in fact differs from the externalised definition of Hijab in religious literature that ascertains (external) Hijab to be a modest way of dressing for both men and women, which is closely connected to an esoteric concept of Hijab that reflects purity of intention and honesty – two key concepts for the formation of a peaceful society from an Islamic perspective.

This report will use data from its national survey to see how affiliation to the concept of Hijab (as it is perceived by respondents) affects its adherents and supporters' connection to key results from our study of citizenship. Is affiliation to this potent symbol of religiosity and difference a marked variable in Muslim loyalty to the nation, experience of discrimination or (dis)satisfaction with life in the UK?

The rights mentioned at the outset form part of a discourse of emancipation familiar in the feminist struggle for equality in this country. Often, Hijab has been portrayed as a hindrance to the fulfilment of these rights. As the recent Hijab bans in France and other parts of Europe including the continuing ban in universities in Turkey has shown, those who choose to don the Hijab are in fact penalised through discriminatory state laws and not religious belief in their pursuit of the rights of education and work.

Whilst clearly in breach of European human rights norms, these laws are often dressed in the language of equality and argued to be the epitome of egalitarianism. As this report argues, nothing is further from the aims of the post-war human rights consensus that enshrined the rights of minorities to be collectively and as individuals, different. The recognition of the particular in this instance does not negate but in fact endorses and validates universalism in its respect for difference. The claim to egalitarianism that these policy makers claim is also undermined by the effects of this policy on the ground – the denial of the rights to education and work, as well as the increase and validation of discrimination against those who wear Hijab.

As we go to press the British Department for Education has intervened in a court case at the House of Lords stage (*Begum v Denbigh High School*) in support of the school's refusal to allow a pupil to attend class in a jilbab (full length overcoat), and the Islamic Human Rights Commission for which organisation this report has been commissioned, has intervened in support of the student.

Hijab has become a powerful tool for policymakers to shape the role and level of development that Muslim women in developed non-Muslim majority countries can have. This level of state interference cannot be healthy in itself,

but more importantly undermines the sense of belonging and love that citizens can and should have for the country they live in. If Muslim women's choices cannot be understood as anything more than a negligent form of self-harm, then the doors not only of opportunity and engagement for Muslim women are closed, but also for the potential of vibrant and diverse voices being added to the mission of social cohesion and gender rights within that.

This disengagement coupled with levels of discrimination is discussed through the interviews undertaken and an extensive survey conducted to assess Hijab wearing women's experiences of discrimination pre and post 9/11. From this we can assess how far the negativity of Hijab has increased in the public perception since those events and contextualise some of the expectations that are articulated. The demonisation of Hijab in academia will be discussed and these findings may serve to shed light on how far that demonisation has trickled down to the British street.

Once demonisation has become commonplace the human rights agenda can be turned on its head and used against those very people whose rights have been denied. As is repeated constantly by pundits and increasingly by governments, the denial of certain rights to Muslim women is deemed to be the result of Muslim women's irrational obstinacy in not removing Hijab – not the result of discriminatory policy and law.

Finally, some academic and policy trends are problematised – particularly those that see a choice for Hijab as a choice against freedom. The very notion of what female emancipation entails is revisited through the narratives of Muslim women themselves – an epistemology that has either long been ignored or manipulated to justify the idea that Muslim women need to catch up on advances made by women in non-Muslim majority lands.

The integration of these perspectives into policy and debate is the normative project of this series and the re-evaluation of current debates on the Hijab with respect to the voice of Muslims is an urgent part of this project because Hijab related policy discussions impact on so many rights that are supposedly enshrined in our legal process through the enactment of the Human Rights Act 1998. Anything less undermines the idea that all have equal access to political participation and worse still that all have an unconditional right to it.

The authors have based their recommendations on the premise that equality between citizens is still a shared goal of civil society and government, despite some statements and policy initiatives from government in recent months.

BACKGROUND STUDIES ON 'HIJAB'

A dearth of literature on the significance invested in clothing in social and political contexts has been acknowledged (Hoodfar, 2003) as effecting one-dimensional, essentialised notions of Islam, gender and in particular the function, effect and meaning of the veil, or Hijab. Whilst Hoodfar argues against structural, essentialising discourses of Hijab that focus on patriarchy in favour of situating its study in a broader framework of the history of clothing as a vehicle for political and social action, the former epistemology seems favoured in contemporary academic treatment of the subject. The lack of diverse voices, including those of women who support and / or wear the Hijab, is reflected in a wider concern about Muslim women's experiences reflected in academic literature (see e.g. Wyche, 2004, Ahmad, 2001)

Discussions on Hijab focus on it as symbol of identity (minority, national, resistance, gender), of integration or assimilation (the lack thereof) or (lack of) progress towards gender equity in the contexts of individuals, communities and societies. It has also found a role as a marker or symbol according to this typology within a broader social science literature dealing with meta-concepts of political theory in the global arena. This includes its use as a cipher in the 'clash of civilizations' discourse marking out immanent resistance, as well as providing thresholds for the realisation of more supposedly cosmopolitan theories of political normativity. The ultimate liberal society fashioned by Fukuyama (1992) as the end of history finds much resonance in both political debates surrounding the banning of Hijab, as well as the 'contrary' idea that allowing women to wear Hijab (as minorities) integrates them better into wider society and so (often implicitly) will see the decrease and eventual elimination of the practice through a teleological process in which minority, particularly Muslim, women lag (e.g. Giddens 2004, Wihtol de Wenden, 1998). Hijab is sought to be understood in broadly two terms: what meaning and significance does it have for the women who wear it and what effects does its practice have on gender roles and equity.

MEANING

Where such discussions try to empirically assess the 'meaning' of Hijab for its adherents, this 'meaning' is understood through the normative lens of the above typology. Characterized as a psychocultural approach, it overtly or implicitly focuses on the need for adaptation. Hijab as part of a gender and migration discourse has been identified as variously a minor or hugely influential feature of a culture in deficit that has not reached the norm. Researchers unwittingly or purposely believe it to be their task to help women make the adaptation through their work (Wihtol de Wenden, 1998). Even literature which is conscious of this trend and seeks to study the experiences of minority women in Western countries, the standards of traditionalism versus freedom and secular notions of gender equity informs discussion of integration and even the role of migrant women as cultural mediators between minority communities and the majority.

Acknowledgements that Hijab, as worn by some minority women, may be a strategy or even (an) alternative femininity / ies as in Dwyer (1999) are rare. Further, even when discussed in academia (Abu Odel, 1993 in Dwyer 1999) or popular (Alibhai-Brown, 1994) literature, the acknowledgement of Muslim women's adoption of Hijab as transformative are deemed to be ultimately futile attempts at feminist discourse.

Studies focusing on the popularity of the veil in a South East Asian context have been able to move beyond some of the limitations imposed in the

European and North American literature of veiling. The Javanese resurgence of veiling in the post-Suharto Indonesia has been described as an alternative or new modernity (Brenner, 1996). Habermas' (1987) definition of modernity as signified by a significant shift in historical consciousness and a conceptualization of the present as sharply distinct from the past, in Brenner's opinion has fit with the present day Javanese experience of Hijab. During Suharto's time, Hijab had been seen as a sign of backwardness (Giddens 2004) and yet now was being readopted in distinctly un-traditional styles by the young, many of whom come from non-veiling or extremely secular families or social circles. Brenner's study belied Western assumptions that veiling is synonymous with a heavy female dependence on parents or husbands. She concludes, in a step beyond the European and American literature on Hijab:

“...if one wishes to look at veiling as an assumption of power relations on women's bodies, as many people have, then one must also recognise the potential of veiling for destabilising or refiguring those relations of power.”

Giddens (2004) identifies discussions around Hijab as characterising the practice as 'a global fault line between Islam and the other' and proposes that this is an incorrect appraisal. He contends that the meaning of Hijab or at least discussions around it are located in the changing position of women in a global not Muslim or Islamic context. He still assigns 'traditional' values to the concept, linking it to notions of family and strict divisions of labour between men and women as factor shared by most religious fundamentalism and not restricted to Islam. For this reason he states: '...the hijab has no unitary meaning. It reflects the diversity of women's experience and aspirations around the world.'

This is challenged by El-Guindi (1999) who deconstructs such ideas within an Egyptian context, citing the surprise of both religious and secular authorities at the adoption of Hijab by many women in the 1970s. Like Brenner, she identifies this as a new movement based on an Islamic feminist consciousness not a re-adoption of a national or cultural symbol, although aspects of the struggle against Western cultural and regional hegemony are cited as part of the complexity of the discourse around the veil.

PRACTICE

El-Guindi also charts the effects of the adoption of Hijab in various contexts as evidencing forms of Islamic feminism, often in contrast to Western oriented feminisms that have indigenous male genesis (Egypt) or foreign colonial genesis (Algeria). In the Egyptian case she strongly identifies the process of adoption as populist, started by women of different classes and backgrounds and most importantly a movement from which a genuine grassroots feminism emerges. This compares with Western models advocated from the turn of the 20th century whose initial proponents often included men and whose proponents were from higher, Western educated classes. This is key to the relevancy of feminism to the lives of ordinary people, and what makes the adoption of the veil for El-Guindi a factor for progressive change and women's emancipation in the Egyptian context.

The veil also signifies resistance, and El-Guindi charts the vehemence with which Algerian women retained the Hijab in the face of concerted French efforts to have it removed from Algerian society as part of a measure to completely eradicate the native from Algerian culture. Such resistance has been noted as extant in pre-Revolutionary Iran in the 1970s (El-Guindi, 1999) and Turkey (Breu and Marchese (2000) Olson 2001).

WHAT IS 'HIJAB'?

Whilst this type of typologising has been critiqued by both whiteness scholars and critical race theorists with particular reference to patriarchal whiteness regarding inter alia law (Neal Cleaver, 1997), educational policy (Thompson 2004) and even standpoint and empirical strands of feminism (Rich, Wind et al, 1997). This critical lens has yet to be applied systematically to discussion surrounding Hijab in literature and policy, the result being that research questions are framed by researchers problematising the Hijab as part of a body of knowledge that is shaped by assumed norms that ultimately reflect the historical privilege of a predominantly white and non-Muslim context, which becomes the unmarked condition against which difference is measured. Mahmood (2005) cites Hijab as a locus of this tension in her problematising of pervasive norms. She recognises that the issue of Islamic revival is effectively always analyzed through a strain of feminist theory, sometimes even unknowingly. Thompson's critique of the APA Manual's reflection of patriarchal whiteness relates to this discussion as it identifies this benchmark and also analogises, within the context of educational policy and practice research, the scenario where a student-centred pedagogy in an all-white classroom is likely to be regarded as "not about race", whereas a similar study involving American Indians would.

Whilst not specifically relating to discussion of Hijab, Thompson's analogy has resonance with discussions of studies in the UK of Muslim schoolgirls and the role of dress in gendering diaspora theories of identity. Fauzia Ahmad (2001) notes in her survey of literature on Muslim women in the UK that there is an 'overuse' of Muslim schoolgirls in research. Whilst not denying the importance of generational accounts, she notes that Muslim schoolgirls with relatively little life experience are placed as 'representatives' of 'experts', a role rarely accorded to white teenage girls. Dwyer (2000), in her study of Muslim schoolgirls in two schools, elaborates on Anthias' (1998) contention that diaspora theory needs to be de-essentialised and that the role of gender in creating multilayered and rich meanings is essential to a constructive discourse. Dress i.e. traditional or Islam oriented dress is highlighted in a variety of ways, yet ultimately all in the context of the Indian, East African South Asian and predominantly Pakistani (Mirpuri) sample, as a patriarchal concept that controls or is used as an attempt to control young Muslim women's lives. European or non-Muslim dress is inferred as the opposite by positioning the expression of revulsion of male relatives whose views are recounted by the sample as determining the liberating value of European dress. Thompson's example highlights how ideas of patriarchal and anti-egalitarian forces affect discussions of dress³ within a British Muslim context. Dress, be it a Pakistani *shalwar kameez*³ with or without *dupatta*⁴, a

3

An outfit consisting of a long tunic (*kameez*) worn over pants (*shalwar*), and sometimes comes with a *dupatta*. Traditional to northern India and Pakistan, but modern variations on the tunic/pants combination are found around the world.

4

A rather large scarf worn by women to compliment a *salwar-kameez* (a long shirt and a pair of pants). The *dupatta* is often used to cover the head and is a mark of propriety, not unlike the pallu of a sari which performs the same function.

more Middle Eastern scarf often called *Hijab*⁵ or *burka*⁶, *jilbab*⁷ or other form of traditional, ethnic or Islamic dress form is problematised only in a racial and religious context set against a supposedly neutral or progressive norm i.e. is its European, non-Muslim opposite. The latter, as it is inferred, is not affected by patriarchy and is not part of a discourse that controls femininity or gender identity in often discriminatory and anti-egalitarian ways. Dress in this scenario that then includes forms of Hijab means forms and controlling mechanisms of women's subjugation.

This dualism often trickles down into popular culture and particularly popular journalism (McDonough, 2003) with the presentation of two opposed realities. Reason, intelligence, democracy, equality of the sexes sit together and oppose religion, stupidity, violence and oppression. A review of Canadian press coverage bears out the notion that the Hijab is seen in the non-Muslim psyche too to represent the suppression of individual women, Muslim women en masse and also through the perception that the veil is enforced by Muslim men, a way for Muslim men to 'enforce their domination on the whole world through changing law and social practice.' The French situation bears marked similarity (El Hamel, 2002) with the dominant culture squarely positing the Hijab as a threat to the state and a symbol of backwardness that inheres 'inferiority, oppression, passivity and docility'.

This is not a new concept and in fact the idea of dress that covers, in particular the hair, as being a signifier of female subjugation can be found in literature dating back to the early 20th century. Whilst the European led Orientalist preoccupation with veiling in a Muslim context has a much longer history (Ali, 2003, Kabbani 1989), some argue that the veiling of women *per se* is oppressive and is by no means confined to Muslims. Galt (1931) alluded to her findings through various archeological digs and further research that indicate that many civilizations, including the Greek and Roman models that post-Enlightenment European societies modelled themselves on, saw women veiled as a norm – a norm the author identifies as inhering male possession of women as chattels. Others argue that the negative allusions to Hijab emanate from the Crusades (Alvi and McDonough, 1994), whilst other see it definitely manifested in imperialist discourses that included the veil as part of a litany of abuses Muslims allegedly enacted upon women (Ahmed, 1992 cited in Alvi, 2003). These assumptions of negativity are often carried into discussion of Muslim women even today, and even in normative theory work which does not source original data, often creating its normativity out of this body of self-referential work. El Guindi (1999) attests to the fact that Islamic Feminism is left out of the literature of Egyptian feminism: 'secularist-bound scholars either deny its existence or ide-

5

The square or triangular type scarf that is worn over the head and pinned beneath the chin, but the word can also refer more generally to any type of headcover.

6

Used to refer to veil which is tied on the head, over a headscarf, and covers the face except for a slit at the eyes for the woman to see through. Other types of burka cover the entire body and face. The eyes are covered with a 'net curtain' allowing the woman to see but preventing other people from seeing her eyes.

7

A full-length loose outer garment like a coat or a cloak

ologically dismiss any scholarly discussion of such formulations (even empirical studies) as apology.’

Prominent amongst these, is Mernissi (1975). Whilst her actual discussion of the veil is slight her title emphasises an aspect of Muslim identity the totality of which, as she perceives it, she extensively critiques through theory work based on a structural discussion of equality and rights in an economic context and empirical data that explores the then already existing erosion of traditional Moroccan family and social structures as the country forged towards a post-colonial independent future. Her legacy has been, however to provide a substantial critique of concepts she understands to be faith based, and which may have currency in a local traditional context e.g. perceptions that women are legally the possessions of male relatives. Such perceptions are universalised as *the* theory and structural practice of Islam and as such formulate persisting norms in literature about Muslim women. The veil then symbolises a total system of subjugation and inferiority against which Muslim women and according to Mernissi, Muslim men need to liberate themselves from.

Whilst Mernissi (1987, 1991 and 1993) later contends that Islamic history and tradition is replete with examples of female political leaders and argues that Islamic teachings have been corrupted by patriarchal forces causing a decline in such examples, she maintains that veiling forms part of this corruption and is not related to the processes of political power in which Muslim women have participated. The veil again is determined as part of a negative discourse of disempowerment that is male led and imposed.

El Hamel (2002) notes that most feminist literature on the Hijab equates it with segregation and seclusion of women, and this preoccupation forms part of a process of discrimination against Muslims. The controversy over the wearing of Hijab in French schools in her opinion, is one of equality not between genders but between Muslim and other French citizens. The failure to respect the religious rights of Muslims is a failure of the French state to accord equal citizenship.

As El Hamel contends that the controversy over the Hijab in France has actually shown more about the French character than about the Muslim mentality, much of the academic literature that essentialises Hijab and its perceived ‘meaning’ reflects academic cultures and structural prejudices that are ripe for interrogation. Ahmad (2001) points out the essentialising nature of many methodologies used in studies relating to Muslim women of South Asian origin in the UK that typically presume and equate e.g. higher levels of education with less or no religiosity, less chances of arranged marriage etc. and analogises ‘traditionalism’ with lack of education. Franks’ (2000) account of white British women wearing Hijab in the UK argues that Hijab itself is not invested with meaning as either liberating or oppressive, and the power relations that are invested in it are contextual. This de-essentialisation has resonance with the findings in this report.

The combination of a self-feeding normativity of gender rights based on western human rights norms and the marginalisation of Muslim women’s activism and rights theory that does not conform to such norms has already had policy implications. The shunning of Muslim and Catholic equity rights activists at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing in 1995, created unequal power relations within the documentation drafting structure but also in countries where the Beijing Platform of Action was to be implemented – those conforming to ‘western’ expectations of feminism, were preferred (Ong 1996, Merali 1996).

The effect of this is ironically the physical denial of agency to Islamic women by other women. This disempowerment is the result of a culturally chauvinistic feminism. Using feminist praxis Foley (2004) argues that feminism needs to relocate its perceptions of what a feminist is through a continuous process of debate that encompasses cross-cultural as well as international perspectives.

This last point is particularly apt for this report. Pervasive ideas regarding what hijab means will be interrogated by the findings and discussed in terms of their impact on the British government's policy not only towards the wearing of hijab but how this relates to on-going debates about citizenship and equality. Archer (2002) notes that competing discourses impact on Muslim women's post-16 education choices. The theoretical and policy implications however of the 'common sense' understandings of culture as a constraint on Muslim women, often act as a structural factor that constrains far more than any external perceptions of what minority culture may do to the women who are brought up within it. As many critical sociologists have pointed out (e.g. Brah & Minhas, 1986, Rattansi, 1992; Basit, 1997; Shain, 2000 cited in Archer 2002) racisms and oppressions within white society need challenging. Brah (1994 cited in Archer, 2002) argues that stereotypes play an important role in denying opportunity to Muslim women.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE GROUP

This report follows a sociological approach based on a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. The quantitative questionnaire was part of a major survey carried out by the IHRC and reported in the first volume of 'British Muslims' Expectations of the Government: *Dual Citizenship: British, Islamic or both?* (Ameli & Merali, 2004), the second volume *Social Discrimination: Across the Muslim Divide* (Ameli et al, 2004) and the third volume, *Secular or Islamic: What Schools do British Muslims want for their Children?* (Ameli et al. 2005). A detailed description about participants and their demography has been offered in volume one, here follows a summary. The total number of quantitative responses came to 1125, with some 800 being collated by hand, and the rest through a widely publicised on-line facility, over a three-week period. The majority of them are male (64%), with slightly over one-third female (36%). They are from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including South Asian, mixed, Turkish, Iranian, Afro-Caribbean and English, and the level of their religiosity and identification with Islam is also diverse, ranging from devout practitioners to cultural and secular Muslims. About 90 percent of the participants are British citizens and more than half of them (55%) are born in Britain.

About 43 percent of the respondents are employed, while the rest of the participants fall into the categories of the unemployed, self-employed and students. The sample group includes respondents from England, Scotland and Wales; approximately half (47%) of them live in London.

We also interviewed 42 women and 14 men from across England and Scotland, with several from London (including Bow, Stratford, Walthamstow, Hendon, Paddington and Southall) and others from Birmingham, Luton, Preston, St. Albans, Loughbrough, Bradford, Wallington, Watford, Colchester, Oldham, Ilford, of England. The ethnic origins of interviewees were also diverse and included Nigerian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, English, Swedish, Belgian, Welsh, mixed, Iraqi, Libyan, Kenyan, and Indian respondents. Respondents were asked their views on the meaning of Hijab, its importance as a cultural or religious value, the effect of wearing Hijab, its significance and the problems and benefits associated with

it. Questions about how Hijab was perceived amongst peers and the wider society were asked and also raised by respondents. The qualitative interviews helped us to interrogate the quantitative findings, and examine in a more sophisticated manner underlying problems with current discourse about Hijab and Muslims. A focus on the everyday and not the spectacular (Ndebele1984) has been particularly important in this series in trying to avoid the extremes of representation that the increasingly polarised debate regarding Muslims in the UK has been exhibiting at the public and policy level.

Finally we have also used data from IHRC's 'Hijab Project' that ran mid-2003 to mid-2004, where 365 women living in the UK answered a series of quantitative questions assessing the type of clothing they wore and the treatment they faced from wider society before and after 9/11. Respondents came from many ethnicities and locations in the UK.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Hijab, as the literature review has shown, polarises around ideas of universalist feminism that draw on traditional liberal values (Mahmood, 2005). Presupposed to be oppressive in academia (e.g. Badinter, 1989 cited in Mookherjee, 2005) and the public realm (e.g. Toynbee, 2001) as a choice 'tantamount to renouncing personal autonomy' (Mookherjee, *ibid*), the Hijab enters discussion as a symbol of teleological backwardness. Effectively it is seen as a problem and disadvantage that its adherents – even when choosing it and choosing to affiliate to it – must do without if they are to effect themselves to be full rational humans and by implication citizens worthy of equality. This demand by universalising liberal discourse prevails in post-structural criticism of universalist, Enlightenment projects – where the blame for discrimination and inequality is effectively laid at the door of those who are discriminated against and treated unequally. Mookherjee (2005) goes some way to identifying a strategy to assuage the concerns of feminism regarding in-group inequalities, with the damning and valid indictment of post-structuralism that anti-Hijab policies in France are effectively racist and unjust. Her model of 'affective citizenship' whereby the equality of minorities with majorities to voice in and outgroup criticism forms a core of this analysis, where the voice of those who wear Hijab and affiliate to it, demand equal recognition at policy level.

Ultimately, however there is a danger that any work on Hijab becomes polemical and this has been a constant criticism of polemic work that often becomes a distraction to the project in hand. In this case it is to problematise the power relations that inhere in policy and not to seek out specifically what the 'truth' is, but 'how truth is evoked, who evokes it, how it circulates, and who gains and loses by particular nominations of what is true, real and significant' (Inayatullah, 1998). Effectively do normative accounts of the good in government and policy language actually undermine the good for some, in this case Muslim citizens?

THE IMPORTANCE OF HIJAB

In assessing the meaning and effect of Hijab on Muslims in the UK – whether it has structural value as portrayed in religious literature and thought, inheres the same spiritual and moral concepts taught by these schools of thought, or whether implicitly or explicitly the wearing of the Hijab conforms to academic and policy representations of what the Hijab’s meaning and effect are – the authors began by posing the central questions as to how important Muslims in the UK perceived Hijab to be in terms of religious values.

Amongst 1125 Muslims, IHRC found that a belief in Hijab was a strong component in respondents’ identities with 81% seeing it as one of the most important, or a very important component of faith (see figure 1 below). Of the two figures, the highest level of affiliation to Hijab was the one that the majority of those surveyed chose i.e. Hijab is one of the most important religious values.

Figure 1: Is Hijab an Important Religious Value?

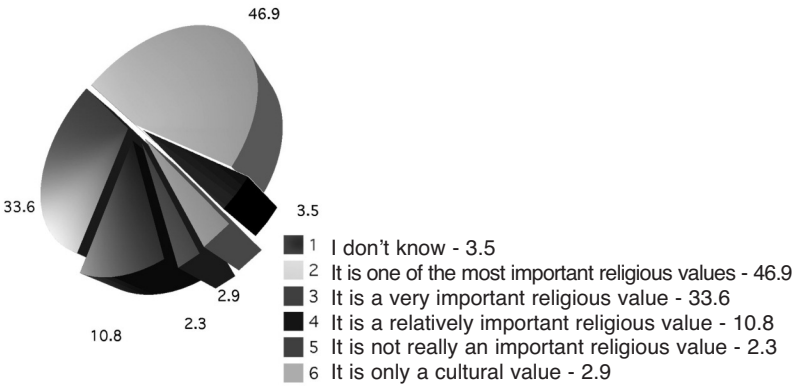


Table 1: Is Hijab an Important Religious Value?		
	Frequency	Percentage
I don't know	39	3.5%
It is one of the most important religious values	528	46.9%
It is a very important religious value	378	33.6%
It is a relatively important religious value	121	10.8%
It is not really an important religious value	26	2.3%
It is only a cultural value	33	2.9%
TOTAL	1125	100%

More interestingly however was the self-perception of religiosity on the part of respondents (see table 2 below)

Table 2: Level of Religiosity and Opinion of Hijab

	I don't know	Highly Practising Muslim	Practising Muslim	Secular Muslim	Cultural Muslim	Don't care about Islamic values at all	TOTAL
I don't know	30 76.9%	4 10.3%	4 10.3%	0 0.0%	1 2.6%	0 0.0%	39 100%
It is one of the most important values	23 4.4%	104 19.7%	364 68.9%	23 4.4%	13 2.5%	1 0.2%	528 100%
It is a very important religious value	9 2.4%	50 13.2%	276 73.0%	26 6.9%	17 4.5%	0 0.0%	361 100%
It is a relatively important religious value	9 7.4%	14 11.6%	74 61.2%	12 9.9%	1 9.9%	0 0.0%	121 100%
It is not really an important religious value	1 3.8%	1 3.8%	13 50.0%	7 26.9%	3 11.5%	1 3.8%	26 100%
It is only a cultural value	1 3.0%	2 6.1%	8 24.2%	12 36.4%	7 21.2%	3 9.1%	33 100%
TOTAL	73 6.5%	175 15.6%	739 65.7%	80 7.1%	53 4.7%	5 0.4%	1125 100%

For those who could not or would not specify their level of religious practice there were ambiguities. Most (76.9%) felt they did not know how important Hijab was. It would seem then that even amongst those whose own practice or affiliation to religion is low or weak, or who do not place religious values at the centre of their life, Hijab is seen to be an integral and highly important part of the religion.

Further, as with academic and policy-based perceptions regarding faith schools, Hijab is often perceived to be the practice and aspiration of those with lower levels of education. This trickles down to the experience of many respondents who frequently remarked that they were treated as if they were ill-educated, could not speak English or were simple:

‘Some believe that wearers of hijab are a world apart from ‘main stream’ society... are very surprised to hear me talking fluent English and shocked that I have a personality’.



‘... in shops or services.

Some assume you’re stupid, or uneducated, don’t know what you’re talking about.... A company representative assumed English wasn’t my mother-tongue based on my hijab’.

(Female, 19, Preston)

‘Yes some people think that hijabis cannot speak English, not educated ignorant ones otherwise no’.

(Female, 22, St Albans)

‘Sometimes, people are awestruck when they see my hijab and see me speak English’.

(Female, 22, London)

As tables 3 & 4 attest, even before 9/11, it was the experience of 60.8% of women surveyed that they were talked down to or treated as if stupid. This rose to 68.5% after 9/11. This rise is reflected in an 8.5% drop in women who previously stated that they had never experienced this type of treatment, and an increase across the board for the frequency with which this type of treatment was met with. Of particular concern within these figures is the rise in frequency at the level of about once a week and more than once a week, a rise of 3.2% and 3.6% respectively.

Table 3: Being talked down to or treated as if you were stupid before September 11th		
	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	7	1.9%
Never	136	37.3%
About once a year	112	30.7%
About twice a year	56	15.3%
About once a month	37	10.1%
About once a week	13	3.6%
More than once a week	4	1.1%
TOTAL	365	100.0%

Table 4: Being talked down to or treated as if you were stupid after September 11th		
	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	9	2.5%
Never	106	29.0%
About once a year	89	24.4%
About twice a year	55	15.1%
About once a month	64	17.5%
About once a week	25	6.8%
More than once a week	17	4.7%
TOTAL	365	100%

Whilst 17.2% of those with PhD level education did not assign much importance to Hijab (see table 5 below), seeing it either as not really an important part of religion (10.3%) or simply a cultural value (6.9%), the majority – 62.1% - assigned highest and high value to it. This is the lowest figure amongst educational level that assigns high value, and while it is lowest, it is still high and also exceptional, with other education levels from below GCSE – postgraduate level varying between 76.1% (below GCSE) to 83.8% (undergraduate level), 84.7% (A-Level or equivalent) and 84.8% (GSCE or equivalent).

The majority in all educational level categories, except PhD assigned Hijab as one of the most important religious values and for those with a PhD, the majority still believed it to be a very important religious value.

Table 5:

Relationship between opinion on Hijab and level of education

	I don't know	It is one of the most important values	It is a very important religious value	It is a relatively important religious value	It is not really an important religious value	It is only a cultural value	TOTAL
Below GCSE	6 14.3%	6 14.3%	26 61.9%	1 2.4%	3 7.1%	0 0.0%	42 100%
GCSE or equivalent	21 10.0%	30 14.2%	130 61.6%	16 7.6%	14 6.6%	.0 0.0%	211 100%
A level or equivalent	12 5.0%	42 17.4%	154 63.9%	16 6.6%	17 7.1%	0 0.0%	241 100%
Undergraduate	15 4.5%	49 14.7%	233 70.0%	26 7.8%	8 2.4%	2 0.6%	333 100%
Postgraduate	18 6.7%	41 15.2%	180 66.9%	19 7.1%	8 3.0%	3 1.1%	269 100%
PhD	1 3.4%	7 24.1%	16 55.2%	2 6.9%	3 10.3%	0 0.0%	29 100%
TOTAL	73 6.5%	175 15.6%	739 65.7%	80 7.1%	53 4.7%	5 0.4%	1125 100%

This has initial significance and resonance at a time when the importance of Hijab as part of the religion of Islam has been questioned by certain scholars and community figures working with policymakers being promoted as moderate by in both the UK and abroad. This position – that Hijab is marginal to the faith, in some cases argued to be negotiable and not a mandatory part of religious practice – has been articulated through the actions and discussions of such figures. It would appear that this line of thinking is very much out of step with grassroots Muslims and the promotion of this line of thinking by policymakers smacks of social engineering rather than a concerted attempt to engage with Muslim minorities.

Clearly Hijab – for both men and women - has exceptional significance in their perception of themselves as Muslim. What Hijab means to respondents as opposed to what current discourse and academic literature (discussed above) will be explored below, with a view to assessing how a key concept of Muslimness can be understood by policymakers in the way it is understood by Muslims rather than as the foregoing highlights as a signifier of muted group discourse, where Muslims discuss Hijab in the terms and language understood by the majority and those that hold power.

The effect of such discourse is manifold. The majority continues to have a misinformed debate that feeds bad policy that feeds minority alienation in a vicious cycle. Further, the sub-discourse of alienation spoken amongst (the) minorit(y)(ies) develops apace, making engagement even more difficult. It is important, and in the current British context, imperative, that policymakers attempt to understand communities in their own terms and not through the lens of their external / majority / elite understanding.

THE MEANING OF HIJAB FOR MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN

The contentious nature of Hijab and its significance has been much discussed. Drawing on responses gained for this volume, it seems that Hijab has multifaceted meanings to both women and men in the Muslim community. What is significant is the divergence of what Muslims themselves believe Hijab to be and what majority society discourses, including those of governmental and academic elites, believe Hijab means. Again this reflects what Kramarae (1981) identifies as dislocation between the discourse of the majority and its powerful elites and that of minorities, who inevitably speak to each other with different meaning than when they speak with the majority, as their own discourse cannot or will not be understood by the majority and its elite.

Perhaps one of the most significant findings here was the articulation of the idea of Hijab as a concept rather than as a specific piece of clothing that affected both men and women and was applied to both. This coincides with major theological views on Hijab as a genderless concept that requires different but equally significant manifestations between genders for the purpose of exterior social harmony and internal spiritual humility.

Many cited Hijab as a form of protection. This has occasionally been mooted in the public sphere as the idea that Hijab protects women from abuse by men. In the wake of 7/7 comments from Muslim College principal Zaki Badawi that women should remove their Hijab because it invites attacks from aggravated non-Muslims and so defeats the object of protection, raised much controversy, particularly from some Muslim women who protested that 'protection' was not the reason they wore Hijab.

Of those citing 'protection' in their responses, what it was protection from varied:

I feel safer when I'm out and about. I don't think I am different in any other aspects such as job interviews, meeting new people'.
(Female, 20, London)

'I don't have to think about being judged constantly. Isolated is not even possible because once you become a Hijabi, you are always in touch with all the other hijabis you meet'.
(Female, 20, London)

'I feel hijab is more for the protection of women, the family and society rather than a form of discrimination'.
(Female, 26, Loughborough)

'I believe it's a form of protection. Just as the holy Qur'an states that the hijab enables a woman to be recognised & protected'.
(Female, 23, Leicester)

‘Wearing hijab has been perhaps the most positive experience for me, as I wear it with full understanding of the philosophy behind it. It is part of my Islamic identity. It reminds me of all the good things that this religion of peace (Islam) stands for. I feel grateful to God Almighty for making hijab compulsory for women as it safeguards them against so much evil. How can such a thing be discriminatory against women as the ignorant claim?’

(Female, 50, Watford)

‘Hijab, in its broader meaning, refers to avoiding and shunning immorality - immoral behaviour, immoral thought and immoral speech. Hijab is the essence of safeguarding individual interests, familial and the wider social fabric. It certainly does not prevent from personal development. It certainly does not mean that one should remain completely covered and do nothing.

‘Hijab is freedom from a materialistic and delusional life towards a more spiritualistic lifestyle’.

(Male, 25, Sheffield)

‘The hijab is an obligation upon the woman in Islam as a beard is for a man. The religion of Islam is not one that is based upon logic, it is a religion that is imbued with it. Thus sometimes although we may not understand the logic behind a ruling from our Lord, we still accept it in the hope that we complete our obligations towards Him. Thus if you were to ask any reasonable educated Muslim woman to take off her hijab, she would quite rightly rebuke you for even suggesting such a thing. She does not wear it simply out of her sense of modesty, but rather she wears it out of the love she has for her Lord’.

Conversely however, some expressed insecurity as a result of abuse and concerns about abuse from the public:

‘I feel insecure in some parts of London due to glances and comments people make. These are all from ignorance of course, but you never know when they can turn aggressive’.

(Female, 27, London)

A more common response focused (as discussed above) on a sense of strength and empowerment through being aware of fulfilling God’s commandments and also as a way of negotiating a modernity that commodifies women.

‘It empowers me to be more assertive as a Muslim. It does not stop me from doing anything that is good for me’.

(Female, 23, Watford)

Hijab as a pure symbol or statement of identity was raised by some respondents but not as a reason to wear Hijab. A 29 year old woman from East London stated categorically that, ‘Hijab is my identity. It was my own choice.’ Another stated:

‘Hijab – identifies me as a Muslim, people know what faith I have when they see me. I am proud of it’.

(Female, 21, Luton)

‘Hijab represents and identifies me as a Muslim. Islam is my way of life and I am proud to be identified as a Muslim’.

(Female, 23, Bow)

Others saw the identification associated with wearing it as helpful in a social setting:

‘It makes it easier to be a Muslim. For instance seeing me with a hijab, people would immediately assume I don’t drink, go clubbing, fornicate etc and therefore will not ask me to accompany them in these things’.

(Female, 20, London)

Two respondents – one who wears Hijab and one who took it off after wearing it for five years, did tellingly comment on how piety and the wearing of Hijab have become associated in a simplistic way and that:



‘Although hijab is not really part of my cultural tradition, I do not like the idea that hijab should be taken to mean that I am telling the world that I am a Muslim, because this in no way reflects my faith. The hijab is usually considered a first step in becoming a more practising Muslim, but I don’t agree; I feel that Islam should begin from within before you consider it without’.

(Female, 21, London)

‘I think a serious concept which deserves respect. I don’t think it is a piece of cloth. With regards to modesty I think you can be modest without wearing. It is a physical projection of the outside about what’s on the inside. I will start wearing it when I am ready to wear it’.

(Female, 23, Birmingham)

Many referred to Hijab as an obligation, and a reminder and corrective to social behaviour. Many saw it as a constant reminder of how to deport oneself properly in publicly, not simply ostensibly but also as a reflection of inner transformation.

‘Hijab means to me a covering and a way of behaving. Hijab is covering my hair, neck and bosom as well as wearing loose clothes that covers all parts of the body except the hand the face (and feet). It also means subscribing to Islam and behaving modestly and having Islamic etiquettes and adabs⁸.

(Female, 29, London)

‘It reminds me that I have to uphold a kind of behaviour that conforms to the modest dressing. Because you become distinguished as a Muslim, you have to set that positive example’.

⁸

(Female, 19, Preston)

‘Wearing hijab gives me a sense of dignity; when worn particularly with a jilbaab. I feel I am properly clad to go out in public. It gives me confidence, dignity and even patience. Because of it I feel honour bound as a Muslim woman to behave with the utmost decorum and equanimity’.

(Female, 50, Watford)

‘Obedience of God Almighty’s commands to be chaste, considerate and polite to others through non extravagant display of beauty and property. An important building stone in the foundation of sound solid families and societies. A symbol of discipline and worship. A measure of self respect and an invitation to a deeper understanding of inner beauty and understanding not superficial limited beauty that goes with time’.

(Male, 30, London)

‘The hijab is just as much an issue for men as is it for women. Modesty is something that is strongly emphasised on both genders to the extent that it is an obligation upon both to maintain it. This helps to keep the morals of society intact and to promote societal cohesion’.

(Male, 23, London)

Many noted that this was particularly significant as they acted as ambassadors for Islam and Muslims as a result of their visibility.

A few mentioned Da’wah (proselytism) something encoded in the Hijab ban in France as reason for the ban, although as Ansari and Karim (2004) point out, proselytism is a recognised right in human rights conventions and as such Muslims as much as anyone else have a right to call people to their religion.

- ‘Self Assessment / Reminder

- Hayaa⁹ + warding off attention (as prescribed in the Qu’ran)

- dawah

I use as dawah, invite people to question me regarding it and hope to reflect a content and peaceful slave to Allah’.

(Female, 25, East London)

‘It reduces a lot of desires and helps me to purify the heart. It reminds me that I am an ambassador of Islam and must behave accordingly. Hijab was a serious choice and I faced mild resistance from my family who preferred me not to wear it’.

(Female, 26, Loughborough)

‘Don’t go clubbing any more, don’t like a crazy life. Don’t take drugs...’

(Female, 21, Bradford)

This last point is of importance for policymakers seeking a genuine understanding of Muslims in the UK. Their multifaceted responses on the issue of Hijab shows many subtle and varied levels of engagement between Muslims and the state. None should be the subject of vilification – not even the spec-

⁹

tre of religious call in a secular state. Muslims are very sensible to the potential for a better society in which they are engaged and in which they see themselves as entitled to participate as co-citizens.

Modesty and respect were also cited by respondents, as core reasons for donning Hijab. Modesty as opposed to arrogance and ostentation in the public sphere as well as self-respect, or a combination of many factors:

‘Hijab means to me dignity of females, safety and modesty. It feels like you are modest and others portray you as being modest and honoured. In my culture, everyone wears hijab but no one is forced or obligated to preserve’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘For me the hijab is now my identity as a Muslim, I feel unclothed without it. It has also helped with my self esteem and confidence because I now feel I don’t have to be a certain way because everyone else thinks it’s good. It was my choice to wear the hijab as I read about purdah and modesty and believe a woman’s beauty must always be covered’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘I believe that hijab is an extremely important obligation for both Muslim women and men. Not only does it protect our honour and modesty but similar to prayer and fasting, it is a commandment of Allah which we will be punished for should we refuse to obey it. We cannot pick and choose from our religion like a box of chocolates.’

(Male, 23, London)

HIJAB, VALUES, BELIEF AND SPIRITUALITY

The first volume of this series (Ameli & Merali , 2004a) highlights a significant response amongst those surveyed regarding what causes them uneasiness or dissatisfaction in the UK. Many felt that the UK gave them a safe and much freer environment to practice their faith in comparison to other countries (including other Western countries), as two respondents surveyed for this volume put it explicitly with reference to Hijab:

I am quite grateful to be living in UK because I reckon its much easier to be a Brit Hijabi¹⁰.

(Female, 20, London)

‘...one of the blessing of this country is that they are more liberal and tolerant of religion unlike France’.

(Female, 22, St Albans)

However many also felt unhappy with what they identified to be a majority British aversion to religion – any religion - displayed at all levels of the culture.

They identified this to be a very alienating part of their experience here and a barrier to being understood and respected. The high sense of affiliation to

¹⁰

Colloquialism for woman wearing Hijab

the Hijab indicates an emotional attachment to religion and its ostensible realisation on the part of British Muslims, be it Hijab or other visual manifestations of faith.

Female respondents overwhelmingly cited spiritual reasons – including obedience to God – for their sporting of Hijab. This response permeated surveys and were not confined to the questions relating as to what prompted the wearer to wear Hijab, or what Hijab means to the respondent e.g. one 25 year old from East London stated that obedience to God was a cause for happiness for her and affected every part of her life – she was happy to face discrimination, and wanted to show everyone (not just Muslims) by example how happy a believer could be when they fulfilled their religious obligations. Hijab for her was key to her identity and formed part of a complex of emotional and life expectations and experiences, all of which were positive but also very nuanced e.g. she expected only the biased and ignorant to discriminate and was positive about Muslim interaction and integration with wider society, yet she saw the practical effects of discrimination and urged Muslim women to be practical in their choice of areas for work and study (i.e. where there is a visible Muslim presence).

Likewise, another stated:

For me hijab is part of my worship and identity. Hijab is quite liberating, forces me to rely on the inside rather than on the outside.
(Female, 21, Manchester)

Obedience to God as a spiritual value manifested as an emotional experience also gave the lie to some forms of popular writing and discussion that opines that Muslim women are somehow psychologically disadvantaged, perhaps even brainwashed, to live dull, unhappy and unfulfilled lives as a result of wearing Hijab.

‘I felt like it was the right thing to do and it was the next step for improving my faith’.
(Female, 22, London)

‘Hijab is very important to me and it is part of my religion. Also, it is tradition. ...it has many effects because if I did not wear it I may broken Allah’s rules’
(Female, East London)

‘Coz its farz!’¹¹ It was the next step for me. I was praying, practising for a very long time and felt hijab was the next step. I felt incomplete and felt I need to wear it to be closer to Allah’.
(Female, 29, London)

‘Ignorant of my obligation to my faith, became aware and started’.
(Female, 47, London)

‘Hijab is part of Islam that I am following and the other parts link this bit in as well, eg prayer and dua, interacting with others etc’.
(Female, 29, London)

¹¹

Farz (Arabic Fard) means compulsory in Islamic jurisprudence

‘I started to practice Islam and understood Hijab when I was in Year 10 (1999)’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘For me hijab is part of my worship and identity. Hijab is quite liberating, forces me to rely on the inside rather than on the outside’.

(Female, 21, Manchester)

‘Due to studying Islam and realising that it is a command from God’. ‘Now – because my religion says so. And I believe Allah swt knows best for me’.

(Female, 19, London)

‘I have been created to obey Allah (swt). Hijab is part of this obedience. It helps me to remember Allah (swt) more often and act accordingly’.

(Female, 23, London)

‘Hijab means preserving my physical and spiritual dignity. I wore it out of ‘serious choice’.

(Female, 23, Watford)

‘I believe it is important for Muslim women to wear it as this was a demand from God’.

(Female, 24, Wallington)

‘Hijab is a religious obligation that every sister who believes in Allah and the Last Day must strive to preserve and observe according to Qur’an and Sunnah. Regardless of whether its accepted by family or culture’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘It helps me to feel proud of being a Muslim and closer to God’.

(Female, 60, London)

‘Hijab means to cover myself and this is a serious choice for me and family because this is an order from Allah, and I want to obey Allah’.

(Female, England)

‘To obey Allah’.

(Female, England)

‘Hijab for me is something that pleases Allah and helps me on my spiritual journey. It reduces a lot of desires and helps me to purify the heart. It reminds me that I am an ambassador of Islam and must behave accordingly. Hijab was a serious choice and I faced mild resistance from my family who preferred me not to wear it’.

(Female, 26, Loughborough)

‘Hijab is a serious choice to me not only because it makes my parents happy to see me wear it but because it is what Allah asked women to wear for him’.

(Female, 18, Luton)

‘All I know is that it is an order of Allah subhanawatala’.

(Female, 33, Luton)

‘Religion – command of Allah

- felt ready

- family

It means it makes me modest, obeying Allah – hence reward’.

(Female, 22, St Albans)

‘As Allah (swt) says in the Qu’ran to guard ones modesty and draw a veil’.

(Female, 23, Bow)

‘It always helps me to remember Allah (swt)’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘Because I converted to Islam and we are commanded by Allah in the Qu’ran to wear hijab. It also has a lot of benefits that further motivates to wear it’.

(Female, 21)

Hijab as a form of worshipping and obeying God, identity and pride in one’s identity are often combined in responses. As one 23 year old respondent from Leicester describes, she began wearing Hijab and continues to do so:

‘To translate my faith into practice and take one step closer to Allah. Having acknowledged the blessing Allah has bestowed upon me, I asked myself ‘why am I not embracing this aspect of my faith?’. I was proud to be a Muslim and it was time to show it.

My hijab has become my identity as a Muslim woman. When I walk down the street I want people to know I’m a Muslim. In no way is it traditional. My choice to wear hijab was based on: ‘Was I going to be subservient to my creator or creation?’. The answer was then very simple’.

(Female, 23, Leicester)

Yet another young respondent articulates that although Hijab is understood to be an obligation its adoption by choice is felt to be liberatory. Aged 18 from London she states:

‘It really is a personal choice which I made due to the will of Allah (SWT) alhamd , I do not in any way feel obliged. Hijab means a lot to me; it gives me a sense of identity, a reminder of who I am and why I was made’.

To be a practising and particularly a visibly practising Muslims confers a strong sense of identity, the effects of which positive / negative, feeling liberation or isolation are discussed in the next section.

HIJAB AND IDENTITY

Franks (2000) situates Hijab as a value neutral social practice that neither inheres liberation or subjugation. Her research found that particularly amongst white convert Muslims in her sample, Hijab was seen to be a positive and transformatory factor in women’s lives.

Those surveyed for IHRC were asked whether they found wearing Hijab or

saw wearing Hijab to be a positive or negative experience, and for those who wore it whether they felt liberated or isolated. The majority of respondents stated that wearing Hijab was a positive experience, combining negativity as the experience of discrimination at work or anti-Muslim abuse, but qualifying this as overridden by the satisfaction they gain from wearing Hijab.

‘It is a positive experience for me. I don’t feel like women are being discriminated as it is their own choice and the will of Allah to cover.’.

(Female, 22, East London)

‘I don’t have to think about being judged constantly. Isolated is not even possible because once you become a Hijabi, you are always in touch with all the other hijabis you meet’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘[I] Feel more me!!’

(Female, 21, Bradford)

One very young respondent of 13 year from Bradford who did not wear Hijab stated that when she did she felt liberated.

The experience and existence of discrimination is discussed in more detail later, but conforms with the quantitative results of the survey. Those who expressed a high affiliation to Hijab, also felt that Muslims were by and large either not recognised by British society, or if they were, there were contradictions to this recognition (table 6).

Table 6: Perception of Recognition by British society and Opinion of Hijab							
	I don't know	Yes, as soon as they get British passport they are British	Yes, but there is a contradictory recognition	No, although they have rights, there is no serious role	No, the entire system rejected them expressly	No, the entire system rejected them implicitly	TOTAL
I don't know	32 82.1%	3 7.7%	3 7.7%	0 0.0%	1 2.6%	0 0.0%	39 100%
It is one of the most important values	11 2.1%	61 11.6%	180 34.1%	200 37.9%	39 7.4%	37 7.0%	528 100%
It is a very important religious value	8 1.7%	33 8.9%	173 46.0%	118 31.6%	25 6.1%	21 5.6%	378 100%
It is a relatively important religious value	1 0.8%	17 14.0%	46 38.0%	50 41.3%	5 4.1%	2 1.7%	121 100%
It is not really an important religious value	3 11.5%	7 26.9%	8 30.8%	6 23.1%	1 3.8%	1 3.8%	26 100%
It is only a cultural value	0 0.0%	9 27.3%	8 30.8%	13 39.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	33 100%
TOTAL	55 4.9%	130 11.6%	421 37.4%	387 34.4%	71 6.3%	61 5.4%	1125 100%

Despite the experience or knowledge of the experience of discrimination, many stated that wearing Hijab had meant that they had become more respected by wider society.

‘Feel respected and proud of my religion’.

(Female, 47, London)

‘A lot of respect is gained because of wearing Hijab’.

(Female, 27, London)

‘– people respect you more. You don’t find yourself in “difficult situations.” Once a man bowed to me on the street, because of my scarf’.

(Female, 20, Britain)

In some cases, discrimination by Muslims was cited as prevailing rather than a negative experience from non-Muslim peers and neighbours. The local effects of Hijab were often described as highly impactful but often always a chance to create engagement between Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as show personal confidence in a religious identity:

‘If it’s a negative experience for me, it’s because some people will make it that way for me. It has become a form of discrimination. Some see it as an inability to integrate. Positive: less pressure/stress on female attractiveness, nor under male scrutiny’.

(Female, 19, Preston)

This sense of confidence is often expressed by respondents as a sense of empowerment both spiritual and physical, e.g. one female from England stated: ‘I feel confident and proud of myself’. In many cases hijab was expressed as explicitly empowering in a gender context understood more commonly as a feminist understanding of gender exploitation in Western capitalist countries.

‘I think it’s extremely positive, I will never feel complete without my hijab. Often women who dress up for others are pleasing others and they are never going to be satisfied themselves. Hijab is not discriminatory, it liberates women from being sex objects’.

(Female, 21, Manchester)

‘I feel more liberated, honoured and respected with anyone. Hijab conceals a women’s sexuality and liberates her femininity as stated by someone from the pro-hijab campaign’.

(Female, 23, Leicester)

‘I don’t feel like a piece of meat being ogled at by any stranger on the street. I don’t feel compelled to fit into the smallest clothes or to answer to the latest high street fashions’.

(Female, England)

‘Liberation of being free from unwanted male glances at me. But isolated as whole commercial industry is based on an image of women wearing revealing clothes, and not being able to buy any moderate clothing easily’.

(Female, 27, London)

‘Wearing hijab has been a conscious and final decision of my journey towards Islam; a necessary outcome of years of deliberation about the teaching of Islam. Moreover, it is also a result of observing the fall of women in western societies and of noticing how disgracefully their bodies are used by the capitalists to maximise their own gains. It is also the women in the west who are being forced by unscrupulous men who use them and then discard them. Preserving her honour should be a choice for all women whether in the East or West. God Himself commands it for the safeguarding of women- Judaism & Christianity also encourage women to dress modestly’.

(Female, 50, Watford)

Hijab, then, is seen as much as a way to assert Islamic identity as it is to defy misogynistic structural constraints on women. A discourse of women’s liberation through Islam inheres in most responses. Respondents place emphasis on the importance of choice and intention is a recurring theme (and will be discussed below), however many respondents also understand Hijab to have structural value which impacts to women’s benefit regardless of choice in the matter. It is an expression of what El-Guindi has identified as an unexpected result of enforced veiling by states – ‘the realisation of possibilities for women that did not exist for their unveiled forbears’ (El-Guindi, 1999 and Mir-Hosseini (1996) quoted in El-Guindi *ibid*).

The close, in some cases, inseparable association between female liberation, Hijab and identity is important to examine given the rising profile of the Hijab ban across the Channel in France. Initially met with obvious few supporters in the UK, the ban has been increasingly promoted in the UK by various public figures and their arguments centre largely (as the French justification does) on Hijab as a divisive symbol and a form of proselytism.

The negativity expressed in the quantitative survey indicates a feeling of rejection by wider cultural, governmental, social and structural factors. Whilst many feel personally empowered and transformed by Hijab, or associate it with religious importance, wider society is understood to be structurally opposed to this and unable to recognise or understand this. MPs and media pundits cite Hijab as variously oppressive or representing a desire to separate and segregate from the mainstream, as a symbol of arrogance and rejection of ‘British’ norms – a symbol of ingratitude to the ‘host’ culture and a multitude of emotions and intentions that are simply not reflected in interviews and responses. What is seen in responses is the pervasiveness of anti-Hijab discourse in the public realm.

Perhaps most ironically, Mernissi (1974, p177) as a symbol of anti-Hijab thinking, hits upon an anomaly in her writing – her vision of an emancipated female subject in the Arab world much faster than in the liberal bourgeois world, where, ‘it will be a long time before they can prevent the female’s body from being exploited as a marketable product’. Muslim women in this survey seem to have employed a short-cut that Mernissi envisaged in the North African context as a result of an inhering (although in Mernissi’s view much to be criticised) agency in Islamic thought for women.

The sophistication of responses and the recurrent theme of gender empowerment undermines simplistic attempts to impose analyses based on culturally specific notions of agency. Whilst this simultaneously upholds the critique of particularistic feminist perspectives, particularly critical race feminism (Neal-Clever et al 1997) it does more than simply deconstruct traditional feminist arguments as oppressive. These responses offer epistemological tools that can be readily utilised by policymakers if they are prepared to use difference as

method (Inayatullah, 1998) i.e. not only accept that current research is limited and different methodologies need to be used in conjunction, but also that difference voices need to be recognised on an equal level.

OTHERIZATION: BRITISH MAJORITY SOCIETY AND BRITISH MUSLIM

Otherization is a concept explored by Adrian Holiday, Martin Hyde and John Kullman (2004). This theme explores a major inhibition to communication by looking at how, so easily, one can construct and reduce people to be less than what they are. As with Said's (1979) concept of Orientalism, otherization is a process that is apt for this study in analyzing how Muslim women feel they are portrayed and perceived and how that hinders them in everyday life. A basic conceptualization of women in Hijab as 'other' precedes any academic or policy debate and epistemological importance of this distinction is made real by the findings of the survey.

The stereotyping of women who wear Hijab was considered to be rife with blame for this placed in the main on the media. Schools, the government and the behaviour of some Muslims were also blamed by respondents.

The effect of stereotyping was a theme throughout most questionnaires and not simply as a response to the specific question asked towards the end of the survey.



'I'm easily identified as a Muslim and always endeavour to provide a good example and be on my best behaviour. I'm often met with stereotyped views of what I should be like, but this is quickly dissolved on encountering my dazzling personality'.

(Female, 21, Preston)

'You become identified as a Muslim so you get all the negative stereotypes attached to it (not the fault of hijab)'.

(Female, 19, Preston)

I have to be a good example always, because I feel Muslims are judged easily'.

(Female, 49, Preston)

Ahmed (1996 cited in Mahmood 2005, page 54) notes that the British as colonizers in Egypt enforced an idea of the veil as representative of "Muslim backwardness" which resulted in the Egyptian elite trying to eradicate the practice. This colonial legacy of what Hijab means in a British context can be seen in the posturing of press and public figures, as well as in the response of Muslim women who have claimed Hijab as a symbol of anti-colonialism, where women's bodies are seen to be a colonial commodity.

At the time of writing, The Star newspaper (15th November 2005) carried a story on page 3 by Nadine Lynge, next to the daily photograph of a topless woman, describing a Muslim ‘Barbie’ doll – clad in black Hijab. The placing of this story on this page itself indicates the level of ridicule attached to the story – which itself is over a decade old. On page 6 a cartoon by Scott, vilifies and ridicules Muslims more. A child opens her gift to reveal the doll, and asks ‘Where’s Ken?’ as pieces of exploding doll land around her. The Ken doll has blown itself up, as the cartoonist takes the male companion of a Hijab clad (doll) to be a suicide bomber (doll).

More than ten years ago, when the Iranian version of the doll was reported on in the British press, media personality Jonathan Ross then hosting his own show on Channel Four also took the doll to task, stating, “Is that a Qu’ran in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me?”

Clearly stereotypes that have been long-running have evolved in recent years and combined to add new even more prejudicial dimensions. As well as being the subject of ridicule, and seen to be backward, Muslim women dressed in Hijab are now also associated with violence.

Julie Burchill in her comment in The Times on Hijab post 7/7 stated further:

“But what a view Islam has of its own women, and what a sad gap between the genders there seems to be, that some young men consider their female co-religionists such shocking bores that they would rather blow themselves up and die in order to hang out with 72 virgins rather than stay alive and enjoy the pleasures of living, breathing, imperfect female companionship.”¹²

When asked about pejorative representation of Muslims in the media and culture, as well as in everyday social interaction, all Muslim women surveyed stated a rise in their experience of this post 9/11. Whilst the rise amongst those who had already had some experience of such events e.g. from once a year to several times, can be attributed in part to a higher sensitivity to such incidents post 9/11, again it is interesting to note that the largest difference before and after 9/11 is in the category of those who had never experienced any negative incidents. All of these figures fell.

¹²

‘Yep, the Hijab does a wonderful job protecting women’, Julie Burchill, The Times, August 06, 2005 <http://women.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,17909-1722809,00.html>

Table 7: How often do you hear or are told an offensive joke or comment concerning Muslim people or about Islam? Before September 11th

	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	6	1.6%
Never	116	31.8%
About once a year	118	32.3%
About twice a year	72	19.7%
About once a month	36	9.9%
About once a week	10	2.7%
More than once a week	7	1.9%
TOTAL	365	100.0%

Table 8: How often do you hear or are told an offensive joke or comment concerning Muslim people or about Islam? Since September 11th

	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	6	1.6%
Never	74	20.3%
About once a year	70	19.2%
About twice a year	69	18.9%
About once a month	92	25.2%
About once a week	31	8.5%
More than once a week	23	6.3%
TOTAL	365	100.0%

Dramatically these findings indicate not only an upsurge in prevalence of hearing ridicule about Muslims, but a significantly large upsurge in frequency in the category of about once a month – from 9.9% of respondents to 25.2%. Given this atmosphere it is hardly surprising that respondents who showed high affiliation to the concept of Hijab (whatever their gender) also saw the British media to be Islamophobic – a consistent result across the entire series (see table 9 below).

When asked about actually being directly ridiculed, again the pre and post 9/11 results are telling:

Table 9: How often have you been made fun of, laughed at or mocked before September 11?		
	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	9	2.5%
Never	193	52.9%
About once a year	96	26.3%
About twice a year	39	10.7%
About once a month	16	4.4%
About once a week	6	1.6%
More than once a week	6	1.6%
TOTAL	365	100.0%

Table 10: How often have you been made fun of, laughed at or mocked since September 11?		
	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	10	2.7%
Never	136	37.3%
About once a year	75	20.5%
About twice a year	66	18.1%
About once a month	42	11.5%
About once a week	26	7.1%
More than once a week	10	2.7%
TOTAL	365	100.0%

Whereas before 9/11 just over half of respondents had never experienced any such ridicule, and of those who did most experienced it at most twice a year, subsequent to 9/11, 59.9% said they had been made fun of or ridiculed for being Muslim. The pre 9/11 level was already high but there is a clear and sustained increase in the post 9/11 climate. The difference of experience between those who wear Hijab, jilabab, niqab and those who do not dress in a visibly Muslim manner is distinct.

Table 11: Experience of being laughed at or mocked according to type of Islamic dress

	No answer	Never	About once a year	About twice a year	About once a month	About once a week	More than once a week	TOTAL
Hijab wearing	3 1.3%	121 53.1%	64 28.1%	23 10.1%	9 3.9%	5 2.2%	3 1.3%	228 100.0%
Jilbaab wearing	4 4.6%	42 48.3%	20 23.0%	14 16.1%	4 4.6%	1 1.1%	2 2.3%	87 100.0%
Nikaab wearing	0 0.0%	11 55.0%	4 20.0%	1 5.0%	3 15.0%	0 0.0%	1 5.0%	20 100.0%
Loose shawl	1 11.1%	5 55.6%	2 22.2%	1 11.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	9 100.0%
Not visibly Muslim dress	1 4.8%	14 66.7%	6 28.6%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	21 100.0%
TOTAL	9 2.5%	193 52.9%	96 26.3%	39 10.7%	16 4.4%	6 1.6%	6 1.6%	365 100.0%

Table 12: Experience of being laughed at or mocked according to type of Islamic dress since September 11

	No answer	Never	About once a year	About twice a year	About once a month	About once a week	More than once a week	TOTAL
Hijab wearing	5 2.2%	94 41.2%	46 20.2%	37 16.2%	28 12.3%	12 5.3%	6 2.6%	228 100.0%
Jilbaab wearing	3 3.4%	24 27.6%	16 18.4%	23 26.4%	12 13.8%	8 9.2%	1 1.1%	87 100.0%
Nikaab wearing	0 0.0%	3 15.0%	2 10.0%	5 25.0%	2 10.0%	5 25.0%	3 15.0%	20 100.0%
Loose shawl	1 11.1%	2 22.2%	4 44.4%	1 11.1%	0 0.0%	1 11.1%	0 0.0%	9 100.0%
Not visibly Muslim dress	1 4.8%	13 61.9%	7 33.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	21 100.0%
TOTAL	10 2.7%	136 37.3%	75 20.5%	66 18.1%	42 11.5%	26 7.1%	10 2.7%	100.0%

With regard to affiliation and perception of Islamophobia in the media, it is notable that the less affiliation to Hijab expressed from those who considered Hijab to be unimportant or merely a cultural value, there were lower levels of perception that the media was Islamophobic. However this level of perception was still high, at 50% and 45.5% respectively and still constituted the majority of respondents in these categories. The second largest category in all groups saw the media to be racist and in these two particular sets of affiliation (or lack thereof) to Hijab, those who saw the media to be racist did so in greater number within their group than other categories. This is significant in that although they perceived high but lower levels of Islamophobia in the media that those who displayed higher affiliation to Hijab, they still perceived there to be deeply prejudicial structural problems within the media.

Of all levels of affiliation again these two lower levels saw greater numbers express the idea that the media was fair. However, the highest was almost a fifth of those who saw the media to be fair were those who saw Hijab as only

a cultural value. However even amongst these respondents, notably many more saw the media to be racist or Islamophobic even in this category.

Table 13: Relationship between opinion of Hijab and the media's representation						
	I have no idea	Islamophobic	Racist	Fair representation of all Muslims	Overtly fair representation but covertly destructive	TOTAL
I don't know	29 74.4%	7 17.9%	2 5.1%	0 0.0%	1 2.6%	39 100%
It is one of the most important values	33 6.3%	353 66.9%	73 13.8%	19 3.6%	50 9.5%	528 100%
It is a very important religious value	18 5.0%	236 62.4%	71 18.8%	8 2.1%	44 11.6%	378 100%
It is a relatively important religious value	8 6.6%	78 64.5%	11 9.9%	8 6.6%	14 11.6%	121 100%
It is not really an important religious value	2 7.7%	13 50.0%	6 23.1%	4 15.4%	1 3.8%	26 100%
It is only a cultural value	2 6.1%	15 45.5%	10 30.3%	6 18.2%	0 0.0%	33 100%
TOTAL	93 8.3%	702 62.4%	175 15.6%	45 4.0%	110 9.8%	1125 100%

Of the women surveyed of their pre and post 9/11 experiences of the media, significantly this question elicited one of the lowest rates of response in the category of never having an experience. When asked about seeing negative or insulting stereotypes of Muslim people in the media (news, TV etc), only 14.5% of those surveyed said that pre-9/11 they had never seen any such stereotypes. After 9/11 this figure dropped to 4.1%. Of those who reported seeing this type of stereotyping more than once a week there was a steep rise from 9.6% pre 9/11 to 29.9% after 9/11 – the highest response for this question.

Table 14: Seeing negative or insulting stereotypes of Muslim people in the media (news, TV etc) before September 11th		
	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	14	3.8%
Never	53	14.5%
About once a year	70	19.2%
About twice a year	83	22.7%
About once a month	72	19.7%
About once a week	38	10.4%
More than once a week	35	9.6%
TOTAL	365	100.0%

Table 15: Seeing negative or insulting stereotypes of Muslim people in the media (news, TV etc) since September 11th

	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	12	3.3%
Never	15	4.1%
About once a year	26	7.1%
About twice a year	30	8.2%
About once a month	79	21.6%
About once a week	94	25.8%
More than once a week	109	29.9%
TOTAL	365	100%

The impact of such stereotypes is noted by many respondents:

‘People tend to think I am oppressed, and usually hesitate to talk to me or interact with me’.

(Female, 20, London)

Of the women surveyed on pre and post 9/11 experiences, there was again a notable rise in the amount who said that others expected them to act as Muslim stereotypes. Those who said they never experienced this in a typical year dropped from 32.3% to 18.9% after 9/11. Significantly of all the questions asked with regard to personal experience, this question had the one of the highest pre and post 9/11 rate of frequency. Being treated according to stereotype is a pervasive experience for Muslim women. Being treated in this way frequently, from between once a month to more than once a week rose from 23% to 44.4% - almost double.

Table 16: Others expecting you to be as Muslim stereotypes e.g. oppressed Muslim women before September 11th

	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	10	2.7%
Never	118	32.3%
About once a year	86	23.6%
About twice a year	67	18.4%
About once a month	53	14.5%
About once a week	14	3.8%
More than once a week	17	4.7%
TOTAL	365	100.0%

Table 17: Others expecting you to be as Muslim stereotypes e.g. oppressed Muslim women after September 11th

	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	7	1.9%
Never	69	18.9%
About once a year	56	15.3%
About twice a year	71	19.5%
About once a month	78	21.4%
About once a week	37	10.1%
More than once a week	47	12.9%
TOTAL	365	100.0%

‘Yes, at work sometimes I feel that people don’t understand me, and see me as being difficult and a nuisance. People often make the wrong assumption especially have stereotypical ideas about Muslim women and think that’s me’.

(Female, 29, London)

Almost all laid the blame for stereotyping on the media, with one going so far as to say: ‘Yes, there is a negative stereotype, and it is media supported by the government!’(Female, 23, Edinburgh). Notably some also blamed the negative behaviour of some Muslims as attributing to negative stereotyping:

‘Definitely a lot of stereotypes around particularly negative ones about hijab. Although the media is the main culprit, it is also other people including Muslims who have stereotypes of women who wear the hijab. The whole system (I guess the world system) has stereotypes about Muslim women; these stereotypes have come from Muslims themselves. Ignorance and lack of tolerance and understanding is what brews these stereotypes. I think that everyone is partly responsible for creating and sustaining these stereotypes’.

(Female, 29, London)

‘...media and Muslim men who treat females in families with no respect and force hijab on them. Also Muslim men who look down on Muslim women wearing hijab.’

(Female, 20, London)

‘I don’t think the problem is with laws or the government. It’s mainly within the Muslim communities. There are still a lot of backward, restrictive attitudes and customs within the Muslim community, and in some cases even domestic violence. We need to sort these problems out.’

(Female, 21, Preston)

It's seen as being imposed by men/family/culture, etc. not a free choice. Backward, extremist, illiberal, repressive. Both Muslims and the media are to blame. Generally, when Muslims behave badly – forced marriages / domestic violence – some hijab imagery on the media seems to appear somewhere. A lot of the media can be very Islamophobic – this happens because so few Muslims are in the media!

(Female, 19, Preston)

'A lot of people think that Muslim people are oppressed, have no freedom and have forced marriages. But I think that these stereotypes are being dealt with this. Both the media and the Muslim community are responsible for this-this is bound to happen when our community resort to culture rather than religion.'

(Female, 21, Manchester)

The spectre raised by such representation is that negative views are the dominant views and this inevitably envisions a future where this negativity holds even more sway. Again sophistication and multi-layered analyses of how these stereotypes perpetuate and how they effect policy needs to be taken on board at the governmental level, if as it seems, the media itself fails to regulate itself and become: 'sensitive to the different ways women and men, civilisations, class, people with disabilities and those without (among other categories) know the world' (Inayatullah, 1998).

Whilst Muslim misdemeanour is also cited, it cannot be argued that there is no scrutiny of such misdemeanour or indeed lack of clamour that this be addressed. Just as the Metropolitan Police Service has been accorded unprecedented powers to intervene in situations it believes to be pre-crime situations (i.e. a situation where no crime has been committed but someone fears that she will be a victim of crime) in the case of potential 'honour killings', so pre-emptive policies must be enacted to prevent the increasingly institutionalised effects of discrimination against Muslim women and this includes negative media representation.

HIJAB, SOCIETY AND POLITICS

LOYALTY AND RESISTANCE

Hijab as a symbol of resistance, even disloyalty has been reflected in various ways in the academic literature (e.g. Huntington, 1996). It is a concept popularised at the policy level and has found manifestation in Hijab bans in French schools, with some German states, and also parts of Belgium and the Netherlands following suit. All these bans have evoked some sense of the Hijab wearer as disloyal to prevailing secular or Christian values.

However, as with previous findings in this series, respondents with high affiliation to religious values, in this case Hijab, have a strong sense of belonging to Britain (see table 6). Again this runs counter to the idea that obvious displays of religious affiliation are tantamount to rejection of Britain or wider society.

Respondents expressed their experience of interaction as mixed. Whilst seeing the potential for harmonious co-existence, many commented that the situation they felt was running counter to that potential:

'Positive depends on area, east London flexible opportunities for hijaabi's

but outside London (East) discrimination more i.e. work.’
(Female, 22, St Albans)

‘...some people behave better around a muslim e.g. apologise if they swear etc. or behave more gentlemanly. Others treat Muslims as though they are inferior e.g. many women try and push in front of me in queues as though I wasn’t there.’

(Female, 26, Loughborough)

‘Depends where in this world I am. Different feeling on different places.’

(Female, 19, London)

Whilst expressing that strong sense of belonging, female respondents also expressed their determination not to remove their Hijab, even if by policy or law it were banned from public institutions or life. Respondents, with or without Hijab, male or female saw this and issues around the banning of jilbaab as a matter of rights, suggesting that their affiliation to Britain is based on an understanding of it as a place where they can expect their rights to be respected and if they are not, they equally feel empowered to struggle for those rights.

‘I think that such policies show a failure by governments to understand their culturally-different minorities. While it is technically a human-rights abuse, it is above all a disaster for community relations, and hinders the progress of immigrant communities.’

(Male, 22, London)

‘The ban of the hijab and jilbaab is extremely bad policy. The idea that it is somehow wrong to cover oneself up out of modesty is something that not only contravenes strongly established norms of human rights, but also shows an extreme level of intolerance for other cultures and faiths. The policy is quite clearly Islamophobic as it does not apply to any other religious denomination as it does to Muslims.’

‘Will they apply this policy to the cloaks and gowns worn by the priests and nuns in the Vatican? Of course that is doubtful. What is of course strangest of all, is that a girl should be allowed to dress almost to the very point of nakedness, and any protest to the contrary is seen as a breach of her human rights, while a girl wishing to cover herself from head to toe is in breach of the law.’

‘If these incredibly Islamophobic laws continue to go ahead, I hope to see convictions of people who excessively cover themselves during the winter months of the year.’

(Male, 23, London)

Some respondents articulated the effect of any possible ban on Hijab in the UK as a sign of malign intent on the part of the government:

‘It would affect me extremely as it just is a proof that what I believe is not respected and does not hold any significance in peoples eyes whereas a nun or a priest or people of other religious sects can dress as they will with no criticism’.

(Female, 24, Bagworth)

‘Badly, I will feel discriminated against if I have to show my body just to be able to work, especially as I have held a professional job for 5 years now without my Hijab having any affect on my ability to work’.

(Female, 27, London)

The uncertainty reflected in answers in this particular survey, between potential and reality, between good and bad experiences of wider society and the establishment, and the potential for adverse policy from government is realised in more concrete terms in the findings with regard to affiliation to the concept of Hijab as a religious value and perception of the British government’s loyalty to Muslims. As with previous volumes in this series, the overall response was that most respondents – regardless of how they felt about Hijab – felt the government did not respect Muslims.

This again undermines the idea that overt Muslimness is divisive or acts against social cohesion.

Similar numbers of those who believed that Hijab is only a cultural value saw that there was positive support from the government, or that there was support from the government but that this was nominal and superficial (both at 24.2% and 27.3% respectively). Aside from those who did not know what value Hijab had (they did not in their overwhelming majority know what kind of support the government showed – 84.6%), all other categories saw the majority of respondents see a public but nominal support from government for Muslims, followed closely in some cases by the feeling that there was no support at all, and more negatively still that the government actually has seriously prejudicial policies against Muslims.

Perceptions of the government are again shown to be dictated by factors other than religiosity or affiliation to or support for religious values. Given the dual findings of belonging to Britain and value of it as a space for religious practice, and these findings, it seems increasingly that Muslims place themselves in a rights based discourse with regard to their lives, experiences, aspirations and expectations of the government. This is important for government to take on board, given the increasingly hostile drive amongst sections of the press and even government that asks for Muslims to give blind allegiance to the state regardless of policy or law, and increasingly towards what are projected to be majority societal norms.

Table 18: Perception of Loyalty from the Government and Opinion of Hijab							
	I don't know	Yes, the British government is in favour of British Muslims	Yes, without any distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims	Yes, there is some support but not very serious	No, they don't care about the minority	No, there is serious prejudicial policies in relation to the BM	TOTAL
I don't know	33 84.6%	1 2.6%	1 2.6%	3 7.7%	0 0.0%	1 2.6%	39 100%
It is one of the most important values	22 4.4%	21 4.0%	28 5.8%	180 34.1%	142 26.9%	134 25.4%	528 100%
It is a very important religious value	8 2.1%	9 2.4%	32 8.5%	175 46.3%	72 19.0%	82 21.7%	378 100%
It is a relatively important religious value	2 1.7%	3 2.5%	14 11.6%	61 50.4%	26 21.5%	15 12.4%	121 100%
It is not really an important religious value	2 7.7%	0 0.0%	3 11.5%	13 50.0%	5 19.2%	3 11.5%	26 100%
It is only a cultural value	1 3.0%	4 12.1%	8 24.2%	9 27.3%	4 12.1%	7 21.2%	33 100%
TOTAL	69 6.1%	38 3.4%	86 7.6%	441 39.2%	249 22.1%	242 21.5%	1125 100%

The immanent threat from the political establishment as highlighted in the foregoing and the perceived ambivalence towards Muslims by the government is discussed in the next section.

SUBVERSION AND THE STATE

The expression of resistance to discriminatory policy by those interviewed and those who responded to the quantitative survey indicate a dynamic sense of attachment that is imbued with meaning, particularly a sense of expectation with regards to rights.

This can be examined further by looking at respondents' attachment to the law of the country. Again – significantly – religion as a reason for respecting British laws counted for much amongst respondents. The majority of those who believed Hijab to be relatively important also felt that their respect for British law was the result of religious values (38.7%). With those who put less value on Hijab, respect for British law without the reason of religion was in fact the main choice. A pattern can be discerned in these findings in so far as greater affiliation to the concept of Hijab saw most respondents state that they respected British law unless it interfered with their religious values. From this we see a location of resistance based on the violation of rights – in this case religious rights - discourse. However, it is important to note, that for both categories who assigned higher and highest value to Hijab, respect for all British law and respect for British law as a result of religious injunction also factored very high in responses.

In terms of negative response, ironically those who saw Hijab as merely a cultural value in fact had the highest response for having no respect for British law – 6.1% of the group .

Table 19: Opinion of Hijab and respect for British law						
	I have no idea	Yes, I respect all British Laws	Yes, I respect all BL because my religion asks me to do so	Yes, I respect BL unless it interferes with my religious values	I don't respect law at all	TOTAL
I don't know	26 66.7%	6 15.4%	3 7.7%	4 10.3%	0 0.0%	39 100%
It is one of the most important values	23 4.4%	104 19.7%	157 29.7%	233 44.1%	11 2.1%	528 100%
It is a very important religious value	9 2.4%	69 18.3%	128 33.9%	159 42.1%	13 3.4%	378 100%
It is a relatively important religious value	10 8.3%	27 22.3%	46 38.0%	36 29.8%	2 1.7%	121 100%
It is not really an important religious value	1 3.8%	11 42.3%	10 38.5%	4 15.4%	0 0.0%	26 100%
It is only a cultural value	0 0.0%	14 42.4%	11 33.3%	6 18.2%	2 6.1%	33 100%
TOTAL	69 6.1%	231 20.5%	355 31.6%	442 39.3%	28 2.5%	1125 100%

Contestable sites within the law were identified by respondents as any possible ban on Hijab and terrorism laws. Both were identified as being based on prejudice and misconceptions about Muslims that needed to be challenged in many ways, but which should not be allowed to be enacted into law.

An uncertainty with regard to the future in Britain was again articulated. The authors found in the first volume in this series that most respondents feared for or were anxious about their future in the UK¹³. Most articulated fears of being labelled as a terrorist and feared physical abuse and even wrongful arrest. The women surveyed about their pre and post 9/11 experiences significantly saw an increase in anti-Muslim policies from political parties.

Table 20: Observing political policies that negatively affect Muslim people – during a typical year		
	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	13	3.6%
Never	99	27.1%
About once a year	98	26.8%
About twice a year	59	16.2%
About once a month	55	15.1%
About once a week	20	5.5%
More than once a week	21	5.8%
TOTAL	365	100.0%

Table 21: Observing political policies that negatively affect Muslim people since September 11th		
	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	13	4.1%
Never	58	15.9%
About once a year	43	11.8%
About twice a year	57	15.6%
About once a month	78	21.4%
About once a week	52	14.2%
More than once a week	62	17.0%
TOTAL	365	100.0%

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see Ameli, S.R. & Merali A. (2004b:50-53)

When asked what laws if any were necessary to help Muslim women who wore Hijab, responses ranged from effective non-discriminatory anti-terrorism laws to better anti-discrimination law and the implementation of some form of shariah law or mediation.

‘Religious discrimination act to incorporate Muslim women and their Requirements’.

(Female, 25, East London)

‘To been treated like others and to be nice to others as well as non-Muslim / Muslim’.

(Female, East London)

‘Greater punishment for discrimination and racial abuse.’

(Female, 29, East London)

‘Hijab protection laws and laws that protect people who practice their religion (which we have in some ways). Its not just laws that needs to be given to protect women but the attitude and behaviour of people including that of Muslim women and men’.

(Female, 29, London)

‘None really as long as they don’t change it for the worse like France’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘More jobs in non – free mixing environments.

(Female, 22, St Albans)

‘It seems ok at the moment, maybe more segregated gyms, swimming pools, etc

(Female, 25, Watford)

‘The media should try and send the right message to the public about Muslim women and not make them come across as illiterate, oppressed slaves to men. Maybe this will help the British public respect her more and accept her as part of a working community’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘Cultural laws’

(Female, 21, Luton)

‘Enforce the human rights laws’.

(Female, 19, Luton)

‘Anti-Muslim racism needs to be recognised as a bona-fide form of discrimination, just as anti-Semitism is, particularly within the workplace. Also, the British government has to renew its obligations to international and European law, which does actually recognise the right to freely associate with Islam. Law is one thing, but acceptance of law is quite another. The problem is more cultural than anything else’.

(Female, 21, London)

‘Definitely allow hijab and don’t change law regarding this. Also the way in which media is regulated, reporting needs to be accurate. Media plays large part in this.

(Female, 21, Manchester)

‘Freedom to wear the hijab at the workplace, laws against any discrimination against the hijab’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘Stop propaganda against Muslims’.

(Female, 23, London)

‘Anti-religious discrimination that includes women (outlaw the BNP!) But the Muslim communities need to sort themselves at first, so no one can have anything against them’.

(Female, 19, Preston)

‘In workplaces, uniforms need to be catered for Muslim women’.

(Female, 23, Leicester)

1) ‘Making it illegal to spread false propaganda about a religious community’s practices and dress code in media and governmental organisations’.

2) ‘Having substantial for him those who attack Muslim women on grounds of how they dress’.

(Female, 50, Watford)

‘Laws about religious (Islamic) discrimination, not only ethnic discrimination’.

(Female, 20, Luton)

‘The law of Shariah’.

(Female, 33, Luton)

Whilst often hotly contested, none of these sites of resistance is particularly subversive of the state or its law and all find currency in either cross-community concerns or recognisable practice: shariah mediation in Canada is now available, Muslim family law in India has a long history and the acceptance of mediation for the Jewish community is a facet of British legal experience.

Despite this, respondents clearly felt in the pre and post 9/11 era that high ranking politicians made and increasingly make anti-Muslim statements. In the pre 9/11 era, most respondents, 28.2% felt that they heard such remarks about once a year, and those who claimed they had never heard any such remarks came to almost the same figure, 26.8%. Subsequently these figures drastically diminished, and most respondents claimed to hear such comments on a monthly basis 24.7%.

Table 22: Hearing Islamophobic comments made in particular by politicians or high ranking officials during a typical year

	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	12	3.3%
Never	98	26.8%
About once a year	103	28.2%
About twice a year	67	18.4%
About once a month	49	13.4%
About once a week	20	5.5%
More than once a week	16	4.4%
TOTAL	365	100.0%

Table 23: Hearing Islamophobic comments made in particular by politicians or high ranking officials since September 11th

	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	13	3.6%
Never	46	12.6%
About once a year	42	11.5%
About twice a year	61	16.7%
About once a month	100	27.4%
About once a week	42	11.5%
More than once a week	61	16.7%
TOTAL	365	100.0%

A fear that British policymakers may take the French option does appear, and responses as regards a reaction should such a ban be invoked largely brought the response of a ‘fight back’ and defiance by Muslim women:

Many expressed their intent to protest any such ban:

‘It would p*** me off. Then I’ll find solutions to solve it. Nothing is impossible if you put your mind to it’.

(Female, 19, Luton)

‘It would make me feel extremely saddened and devastated, as it is tantamount to depriving a section of humanity of their right to be good and virtuous. It would be a gross injustice and I would want to fight to have it restored’.

(Female, 50, Watford)

‘I might leave the country after having fought my hardest against the state’.

(Female, 20, Britain)

I would carry on wearing the hijab, and quit where ever I wasn’t allowed with it! (Allah knows best) religion is above all for me.

(Female, 23, Edinburgh)

Several spoke of having to leave the country that they feel they belong to, as a result. One 30 year old female from Edinburgh who had recently adopted the Hijab even stated: “I do worry about it ever since I have started wearing the Hijab.. I am not sure what I would do if it was banned.” However a more negative side, that of the toll or effect of any such ban was also expressed:

‘I would feel very uncomfortable about looking for work and would feel threatened by employers/staff’.

(Female, 22, East London)

‘If the government does not let people wear hijab, I may not be comfortable about it because I am breaking many rules of Allah’.

(Female, East London)

‘...I wouldn’t be able to work and that would have an impact on my life, status, social life, family life and everything else, as money is important. It may also give people the opportunity to be nasty to women who do wear it when they are on the streets and in public places. Might not end there’.

(Female, 29, London)

‘It would have a massive effect on me; it is a major part of my life. It is an essential part of me. I would not work at a place where it was banned, but if was banned country wide I don’t know what I would do’.

(Female, 21, Manchester)

‘It would affect me tremendously, it would be like losing a part of me. Basically, it would be like my self confidence taken away from me’.

(Female, 21, Luton)

‘I would be very angry’.

(Female, 21, Preston)

The issue of Hijab then falls within the category of those values that many Muslim would not be willing to compromise on, despite otherwise respecting the law of the land.

When asked what they as Muslim women who wear Hijab expected from the government (see full results below), the spectre of French style action raised its head:

‘No ban – act against France’

‘The British government should address the hijab issues and expel any fears of banning hijab. They should also have women representatives. All 4 Muslims MPs are males. Totally unbelievable’.

(Female, 22, London)

‘Don’t be friends with the French’.

(Female, 13, Bradford)

‘Don’t take away our right to wear the hijab. That is all because all the other hardships can be handled!’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘Categorically deny the possibility of imposing a hijab ban. Openly condemn countries like France and actively recruit women who wear hijab to show media and public a non-discriminatory stance’.

(Female, 23, Leicester)

Again there is close interplay with an understanding and recognition of rights discourse but also an expectation that the government should deliver, not only on the rights discourse at home, but also in its dealing abroad. The further issue of political representation and political participation is also reflected in the desire for government to involve Muslim women – and overtly Muslim women in their ranks. Whilst challenging the state the foregoing expressions intimate a sophisticated understanding of and expected relationship with the state and its institutions that demands inclusion.

However one respondent’s response picked up very specifically on the theme of pessimism and uncertainty amongst respondents. One 23 year old from Edinburgh stated: ‘I don’t think laws can do anything! Our future here is very bleak!’

CONTROLLING, DEFINING OR NEGOTIATING SEXUALITY?

Whilst claiming to challenge liberal bourgeois assumptions, Mernissi’s work can be criticised through Mahmood’s (2005) interrogation of what she defines as a pervasive feministic discourse that actually inheres liberal assumptions found in many disciplines, against which many religious movements, of which the movement for Hijab can be named one, are judged and held accountable.

Mernissi’s contention that the veil is mechanism for controlling aggressive female sexuality is oft repeated in the literature. Interestingly, female respondents – when citing gender relations and sexuality as part of the *raison d’être* of their wearing of Hijab – posit aggressive sexuality with men, with respondents using common colloquialisms about men ‘ogling’ women, treating women as sex objects and so on.

The effect of Hijab as a way of levelling the playing field between men and women in everyday relations, by removing sexuality *per se* (not just female sexuality) from the public realm, is raised frequently, and Hijab is effectively worn as a way of subverting the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) and creating a female autonomy that resists objectification and by implication subjugation.

‘...feel I can interact with both males/females on an equal level whilst maintaining the respect’

(Female, 20, London)

‘It is very liberating. People see hijab as a restriction and preventing freedom to move. I think it is the opposite; it gives me freedom, it forces me to be very straight forward. However when I am talking to men I find I am a lot more easy going than some girls who don’t wear hijab. I am a lot more comfortable talking to men. There is definitely greater respect for women who wear hijab.

‘... Because of stigma attached to hijab, people are very weary and hence don’t know how to approach you. This affects your interaction more with women than men. Women seem to keep more of a distance no matter how friendly you are. With men it’s different, they seem to open up more and are a lot more straight forward’.

(Female, 20, Manchester)

‘It means covering; it protects from men’s looks and prevents me from caring about how men find my appearance’.

(Female, 20, Luton)

‘Hijab is a positive experience for me and I think it is for the benefit of women. It is a kind of protection from male gaze and potential attacks against women’.

(Female, 49, Preston)

‘Most societies put an enormous amount of emphasis on female beauty. Hijab reduces that and makes male-female interaction easier and less charged’.

(Female, 21, Preston)

‘I feel liberated for a number of things, image wise I don’t feel the demand or the temptation to having to look fashionable and trendy all the time and thus succumb to the pressure many girls face in the society today. I feel by covering I am shielding and protecting my modesty from men’s gaze and seeking to be known for my mind and intelligence rather than my physical attributes’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘It also acts as a barrier from the eyes of men’.

(Female, England)

‘[Hijab is] a barrier, which safeguards the believing men and women from sin and vice’.

(Male, 20, London)

Sexuality as understood by all respondents who raised the issue, requires some form of public regulation – that the public sphere is not one where sexuality should be expressed, is the crux of Islam oriented arguments in this survey, and again the reasoning for this ranged from a belief in this being the reason Hijab was mandated to a more empirical notion of gender politics in the public realm:

‘So far, I have had very few negative experiences, though I see others who do experience discrimination (my sister wears the niqab, and she gets a lot of crap), and I see this as only the most visible part of bigotry in respect to Islam. That others should feel it enslaves women is really hypocritical, because I have more of a problem

watching women feel they need to look a certain way. Gender politics, especially in the office, is alive and kicking in the non-Muslim world.

... gender-designated norms bombard us from birth, right through schools, on the TV, cinema, its everywhere. Successful women are negatively perceived as having sacrificed their femininity in order to progress in what is essentially a man's world, and gender-differentiated norms enforce this perception – clothing, make up, pastimes, sports, etc. When a woman in hijab or niqab becomes empowered to effect her own future, then, she is doing in flagrant disregard of the established social structure, and this is what is disturbing for a lot of people. Especially non-Muslim women, who find it tough enough to achieve success and balance this with enforced domestic duties, because it challenges their conception of gender'.

(Female, 21, London)

'It helps me to remember to place boundaries between myself and non-mahram¹⁴, and it helps me to remember to check how/what I speak about and places I go, with people in wider society'.

(Female, 23, Watford)

Again, the role of egalitarian rights talk is often interwoven in responses and indicates that Muslim women in all their variety have different notions of the meaning of Hijab than those projected onto them.

No-one in the survey saw the conscious wearing of Hijab as oppressive in any way, although not unproblematic in terms of response from family, peers, friends and wider society. One 20 year old female from London stated:

'Since I started wearing hijab, I have felt an increase in my fear and consciousness of Allah and my Muslim identity and role, though I have had to endure being ridiculed and abandoned by those I loved'.

Where concerns were raised about Hijab itself, they centred around the idea that women may be forced to wear it. Of those surveyed, only three said they had chosen to wear Hijab as a result of family pressure – one of which had removed it. None said they were coerced under threat – a scenario portrayed as pervasive by some commentators.

Further, of those surveyed and as indicated above, Hijab has spiritual resonance that affected their choice of Hijab, only two stated that cultural considerations had affected them and both stated that they were persuaded through the positive experience of Hijab that there were benefits of it that did not tally with their initial expectations.

Of those surveyed many felt that those who unthinkingly adopted Hijab or were forced to do so, undermined the cause of Hijab by presenting a bad or uniformed picture of Hijab to wider society.

'It is not a form of discrimination. Before when a woman was seen with hijab she was respected and left alone by man, but these days because so many girls feel forced to wear hijab & at the same time

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A *mahram* is a man whom a woman may never marry because of the degree of closeness of the blood-relationship, i.e. father, brother, son, uncle, etc. A woman is not required to observe Hijab in front of her mahram.

they act in an un-Islamic manner in society, men no longer have respect for hijab woman and feel free to approach them’.

(Female, England)

‘It’s seen as being imposed by men/family/culture, etc. not a free choice.

Backward, extremist, illiberal, repressive.

Both Muslims and the media are to blame.

Generally, when Muslims behave badly – forced marriages / domestic violence – some hijab imagery on the media seems to appear somewhere. A lot of the media can be very Islamophobic – this happens because so few Muslims are in the media!’

(Female, 19, Preston)

‘For me it has been a positive experience. I don’t feel discriminated against. However I have sympathy for those whose family forces them to wear it against their will. I believe that knowledge and understanding is crucial for wearing the hijab’.

(Female, 21)

The last quote indicates that Hijab is understood to be more than just the covering of the head or body, but a mode of behaviour that again involves self-assessment and regulation. Some of this regulation is to do with sexuality, others to do with controlling vanity and pride.

‘I feel very liberated and feel as though the people I come in contact with know me as a person rather than judging me from my appearance. I don’t feel obliged because of my Hijab to keep up with the latest fashion trends therefore it gives me more time and money to deal with life’s more sensitive and important issues!’.

(Female, 24, Bagworth)

‘I understand hijab to mean “modesty”. This is gender neutral and is broader than just clothing. While one must dress modestly, hijab also must be observed in one’s character and behaviour. Issues such as lowering one’s gaze and not flirting when speaking with members of the opposite sex are just as important in terms of hijab as modest clothing. The whole idea is not to attract attention of members of the opposite sex to you’.

(Male, 23, London)

‘A symbol as much as a function of daily life. Also must not neglect that there is a similar basic dress code for men thus the issue of hijab must be looked at within a wider context of just a piece of cloth!’

(Male, 30, London)

HIJAB AND TERRITORIALITY

Hijab as the tool of Muslim men to oppress Muslim women is a mantra of many groups and figures (e.g. Masey 1999). It is still argued that there is an emphasis on female behaviour, which is a cipher for male domination of Muslim women. To this end, we surveyed Muslim men to ascertain their conception of what Hijab is. We also asked Muslim women whether they felt Hijab to be a discriminatory act against them. The responses again belied perceptions that Muslim women perceived the practice as a designation of inferiority or gender discrimination:

‘Positive!
No discrimination at all.
It is our obedience to Allah – not to his His creation’.
(Female, 25, East London)

‘More of a freedom to be able to be myself without having to
impress others with fashion trends and looks’.
(Female, 27, London)

‘I feel hijab is positive as it does protect my modesty. It does not dis-
criminate against women at all’.
(Female, 25, Watford)

‘Hijab can have a very positive effect on me at times but sometimes
I have a negative experience. I don’t think it’s a form of discrimina-
tion because it’s just being modest’.
(Female, 18, Luton)

‘Hijab has definitely been a positive experience for me and I do not
feel at all that it is discriminatory against women in fact I find it
helps to boost our self esteem more as we are not seen as objects but
as people’.
(Female, 24, Bagworth)

‘It has overall been a positive experience. It is not a discrimination
against women’.
(Female, 20, London)

‘None. It is not a form of discrimination but a form of preserving
self-respect’.
(Female, 47, London)

‘It is the total opposite to discrimination against women it in fact
liberates a women’.
(Female, England)

‘My personal view is a positive experience even though I don’t wear
one’.
(Female, 21, Luton)

Most men surveyed understood Hijab to be a concept that is applicable to
both men and women and most expressed that it had meaning beyond simply
a type of clothing.

‘Definitely not just a woman issue. As a dress code, men must also
observe hijab by covering their body from the naval to below the
knee (although some scholars say this is just if working in the sun
and normally, the whole body should be covered), not wearing tight
clothes, ... If you see how men and women in much of the Arab
world dress, its almost identical – loose, flowing robes going right
down the whole body and even the men cover their heads with a
cloth or a hat of sorts’.
(Male, 23, London)

‘Conventional meaning is the cloth to cover a woman’s hair but it
also refers to other modest clothing for men and women’.
(Male, 22, Loughborough)

‘Hijab is equally important for both men and women. In fact, it is more mandatory on men than women, as men have a greater duty towards mankind and towards Allah’.

(Male, 25, Sheffield)

‘Yes it is. It teaches them not to indulge in the superficial but look into the deeper and more significant facts. It also imposes upon them an equal duty to be chaste, respectful of themselves & others and be responsible.

Men themselves are required to act respectably and dress in a respectable manner too whether at home, leisure or work’.

(Male, 30, London)

‘...the physical aspect of covering oneself is not the only part of the requirement for veiling oneself. The concept of hijab also has a metaphorical significance, in that there is an obligation on men to veil their sight by lowering their gaze. Thus one can infer that the concept is as much about external modesty as it is internal’.

(Male, 23, London)

An understanding that majorities did not communicate with Muslims was also expressed:

‘Nope. People who think it’s discrimination have not been explained by a Muslim or approached by a Muslim to understand its meaning’.

(Female, 19, Luton)

The idea that Muslims were not being heard is thematic amongst responses and will be discussed with regard to better education and the media below.

We specifically asked Muslim men the question at the outset as to what respondents felt Hijab meant. All those who responded bar three referred to Hijab as applicable to both sexes and whilst manifested in slightly different ways (men do not have to cover their heads but still need to dress modestly), were equally important.

‘The hijab is an obligation upon the woman in Islam as a beard is for a man. The religion of Islam is not one that is based upon logic, it is a religion that is imbued with it.’

(Male, 23, London)

Of the three who did not respond this way, one who described himself as a practising Muslim, 25 from Leicester stated that: ‘It is important for the man to value the Hijab respect the Hijab and also understand that the choice is of the women wearing the Hijab.’ The other respondent, a 23 year old from London, describing himself as a secular Muslim assumed that Hijab was a female phenomenon thus, ‘In theory it should be a matter only for the women. It is up to them whether they choose to wear it or not.’

Some men saw Hijab as way of ensuring women could participate in wider society and not be (sexually) exploited:

‘As explained above, the hijab is just as much an issue for men as is it for women. Modesty is something that is strongly emphasised on both genders to the extent that it is an obligation upon both to

maintain it. This helps to keep the morals of society intact and to promote societal cohesion.'

(Male, 23, London)

This is noted by El-Guindi (1999) and Dwyer (1999) as the effect of Hijab in securing greater participation of women in the public realm. As stated above, El-Guindi notes that forced veiling at the state level has had an empowering effect as a result, albeit that some women are restricted, many more have new opportunities hitherto denied to them.

WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF WEARING HIJAB IN THE UK?

Ameli et al (2004a, 2004b) found a complex sense of belonging and feelings of rejection manifested in almost all responses in the survey. This 'push and pull of emotion' also manifests in experiences of wearing Hijab in Britain. As referred to above, some respondents noted that there were some feelings of isolation associated with wearing Hijab despite the feeling of liberation that accompanied it.

This isolation was described as manifested in discrimination and prejudicial treatment by others.



'Sometimes liberated but at times isolated when in a non-Muslim environment'.

(Female, 22, London)

'Depends, mostly liberated. A few times isolated when colleagues all spend time with each other and you cant join in because they go to the pub or have a house party with drinks etc however the good thing is, my colleagues have also started experimenting with Asian and Muslim food and consult me when they need to'.

(Female, 29, London)

Before and after 9/11 respondents outlined the frequency of incidents where they were ignored or overlooked, where people moved away from them when in public, and being stared at by strangers. Again there were significant rises in both and this data helps to locate feelings of isolation emanating as a result of treatment in the public realm. Likewise hostility at work was assessed and showed a rise to 43.8% reporting an atmosphere of hostility at work after 9/11, a rise from 30.1%. Hostility at work and the obstruction of career or educative prospects was also commented on by respondents.

‘I didn’t get a job because I had a hijab and the person who did get the job (knew him from before) said that I was a better candidate but I didn’t get it because of the hijab and I guess stereotypes of Asian Muslim women. You always have to prove and try harder’.

(Female, 29, London)

‘When I was seeking employment, I found that many employers would sound very friendly and enthusiastic over the phone but when I went in for interviews they would mutter a very disappointed ‘oh’ and then become very superficially friendly – and I never get the job!!’.

(Female, 20, London)



More than simply being an assumed barrier, respondents recorded actual instances where they had suffered discrimination. Many located this discrimination in the school setting, as well as work, on public transport and a variety of social arenas.

‘At school, while living in Birmingham, I was discriminated against by a PE teacher (who was determined to not let me wear it) and some pupils’.

(Female, 21, Preston)

‘Yes because I cannot get the bus, all people look at me because I am wearing hijab. And sometimes the bus does not stop when he or she saw someone with hijab’.

(Female, East London)

‘Definitely. This society has an adverse attitude towards the hijab. Without hijab women more accepted, with hijab people tend to isolate you and don’t accept you as you are normal.

One phase of my college life I did feel I was discriminated against because students and some teachers had certain preconceptions about me. They were patronising and thought that hijabi women are not as educated and had to be explained; once I was asked if I was able to go out. Although largely the views were not explicit’

(Female, 21, Manchester)

‘I think it has been made into an obstacle in the world of work because of prejudice, companies, etc. not wanting a visible Muslim to represent them because of the negative connotations associated with Muslims in recent years’.

(Female, 19, Preston)

‘Yes, I have been for several job interviews which I had relevant experience and qualifications, but I was rejected. However, before I started hijab, finding a job was no problem at all’.

(Female, 19, Luton)

‘Before wearing hijab I was employed very easily and always felt physically accepted amongst other people. Since wearing hijab it is very difficult to find employment and sometimes I find some people don’t want to speak or mix with me’.

(Female, 26, Loughborough)

‘...depends on area, east London flexible opportunities for hijabi’s but outside London (East) discrimination more i.e. work’.
(Female, 22, St Albans)

‘a close friend of mine who works in D_____ (big finance firm) was told that if she wanted to get big contracts, she shouldn’t wear a scarf!’
(Female, 20, Britain)

A few saw discrimination as not particularly pervasive in employment but did state that they felt top ranking jobs presented a glass ceiling for Muslim women in Hijab.

Others stated that their experience in wider-society was on balance positive:

‘[I] go to college and also help my husband in business, I do get asked about why and when I wear it but after an answer, they do respect my choice’.
(Female, 47, London)

‘Most people have accepted that I observe even at work but it can still be difficult at times, especially when people want to go out and have to think twice before going somewhere that I might not find comfortable. It makes you think about your life, your behaviour and attitude because its not only you who keeps a look out but other people also have an imagine/expectation that you live by and I think that you can get respect from colleagues and other people if you do wear the hijab. Hijab is part of Islam that I am following and the other parts link this bit in as well, eg prayer and dua, interacting with others etc.

Hijab gives me freedom and restrictions-it can make it difficult for non-Muslims around me but it also gives me recognition and respect. People know immediately that I am a Muslim (well most people do) and sometimes I’ve seen that people who generally swear stop swearing in front of me or apologise when they do it so it has an impact on other people. Going out is sometimes difficult especially outside London in traditionally English areas like Cornwall. However, in London it has been fine. I do know of and have friends who have been called names and been spat at because they wear the hijab but fortunately for me, I haven’t had that kind of experience. My interaction has been quiet positive so far’.

(Female, 29, London)

‘As I mentioned I may have received some very odd looks and on a few occasions people will scatter away if they see a lady coming with a headscarf on. On the other hand I have also been treated not as an object but an individual where usually people just judge by a persons looks I have benefited on being judged by my character’.

(Female, 24, Bagworth)

‘In a positive way – men treat you with respect, they know you are not like other girls and respect your chastity
In a negative way – often I feel we have less job opportunities, especially in larger companies’.

(Female, 20, Britain)

‘At High school, because I was one of the first few to wear religious items I was told to take it off, but I refused. My friends (mostly non-

Muslims) got together with prefects and organised a protest in the school (non-violent) to be allowed to wear any form of religious items, signed petitions and taken it to the headteacher, prefects to the board of governors – stating our rights and the situation – we got it accepted. Now when I go to pick my little brothers, it makes me proud to see everyone can wear religious item/clothing or not. They now have a choice’.

(Female, 19, Luton)

‘...only by one lecturer who treated hijabi’s differently to non hijabi’s. However, minority is not an exception; it was 1/100 brilliant lecturers and employers that I have come across.

(Female, 23, Bow)

Well it has somehow become an invitation for non-muslims to ask me about islam -my religion, I interact with strangers more than I would normally!

(Female, 23, Edinburgh)

Although more respondents who gave written answers stated that they had not faced discrimination as a result of wearing Hijab, they did go on to describe acts of discrimination e.g. one woman stated that she had not faced discrimination, because she had always stood up to whoever it was who had discriminated against her and fought them. Another stated that she had not experienced discrimination except from a teacher at school. As Ameli et al (2004b) describe, understanding of what constitutes discrimination is sometimes a barrier to reporting and assessment of levels of prejudicial incidents and attacks. It is clear from the survey that many women feel there is a level of hostility or abuse that is ‘normal’ to their experience – itself an indicator of structural and societal prejudice. In other words some types of discrimination and hostility are so pervasive that they make up the everyday life experience and expectation of respondents.

The much cited tendency to segregation cited by critics of Muslims, finds some expression in a minority of respondents. However their comments indicate that segregation, or the desire for it, has various origins. Whilst some simply live in a Muslim area and do not travel much amongst non-Muslims, others advise Muslim women to seek work and employment in Muslim areas as a strategy to avoid discrimination in other areas that would affect their career opportunities. Another felt they were being segregated against. Others still saw the segregation of gender as part of their *raison d’être* for Hijab.



‘In some circumstances... I urge sisters to work in Muslim populated areas’.

(Female, 25, East London)

‘I feel I have less interaction with wider society as people view me as abnormal’.

(Female, 27, London)

‘I believe observing hijaab and segregation of the sexes helps to preserve the family and contributes towards better matrimonial relations’.

(Female, 26, Loughborough)

Not all women however stated that they experienced discrimination as a result of wearing Hijab. Some examples also belie certain stereotypes. One woman from east London, aged 25 who also covers her face stated:

‘No. I am a dentist who covers fully. In fact, many of my patients enjoy it due to trust / honesty / hygiene’.

(Female, 25, East London)

Further comments include:

‘No-in fact respected and treated better’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘I actually feel a lot more respect’.

(Female, England)

‘Actually I’ve experienced the opposite of discrimination in some cases. For example : I’ve been to job interviews where the interviewer seeing that I am hijabi will explain to me how he understand if I have to pray and he can even make changes for me etc without me having to ask for those things’.

(Female, 20, London)

WHAT SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT DO FOR MUSLIM WOMEN WEARING HIJAB?

Of the women surveyed only two suggested that the government did not have a role to play in improving the situation for Muslim women in the UK.

‘Perhaps it’s not up to the government. I don’t know!’

(Female, 23, Watford)

‘I think if someone is strong enough to wear hijab, external forces don’t make much difference’.

(Female, 25, Watford)

The rest gave responses that broadly fell into the following categories.

ALLOW AND PROTECT HIJAB

Hijab as understood as a way of dressing for those women questioned, seemed to be the subject of some confusion vis the government’s stance. Not only were respondent’s sentient of problems within wider society regarding Hijab (e.g. in getting jobs, see below), they also felt that there was ambiguity in wider society as to the status of Hijab in law. Respondents called on the government to explicitly allow Hijab to be worn and legislate to protect it.

‘Ensure that their right to wear the hijab is protected by law and in practice’.

(Female, 29, London)

‘It should be acceptable to wear. Laws should be passed that penalise those who discriminate against wearing of hijab, just as wearing a turban by a Sikh can’t be discriminated against.

(Female, 50, Watford)

Legal protection

(Female, 30 Edinburgh)

‘To support the Muslim women wearing hijab’.

(Female, 33, Luton)

STAND EQUIVOCALLY AGAINST HIJAB BANS

As highlighted previously, the concern of a French style Hijab ban in the UK prompted respondents to ask for explicit rejection of this in public by the government. It can be inferred from many responses that while those questioned believed the government may support Hijab, their failure to articulate it clearly to wider society, encouraged discrimination. At least one respondent felt that the government was actively Islamophobic. When asked what her expectation of the government were, this 23 year old woman from London stated: ‘Stop propaganda against Muslims’.

EDUCATE THE GENERAL PUBLIC

On this tack many respondents urged the government to promote education about Hijab.

‘Provide the public with more information and truthful information on the hijab and its benefits’.

(Female, England)

‘Educating the nation more about hijab and Islam’

(Female, 29, London)

‘Perhaps better education for the public as to why Muslim women choose to wear hijab. The important thing people don’t understand is that women freely choose to wear hijab and there is no force. If this was understood, I feel people would look upon hijab women differently’.

(Female, 24, Wallington)

‘Ideally the government needs to make people aware that we are not being tortured or a lesser being we choose to wear hijab as we feel liberated. ... Make people aware by media or in schools that we choose to wear hijab and why women choose to wear hijab’.

(Female, 24, Bagworth)

‘The government should educate the public about hijab, reasons why it is worn, why it is important, why it should not be seen as oppression against women. This should include lists of do’s & don’ts i.e. no shaking of hands with muslim women at the work place, having a prayer room set aside in each work premises as a standard practice, make discrimination due to religion a criminal offence etc.’

(Female, 27, London)

Genuine effort should be made by the British government to make the general public understand the reasons and philosophy behind wearing of hijab’.

(Female, 50, Watford)

‘Remove the negative image of Muslim women, especially role models such as Cherie Blair and Mrs. Bush who continually use the hijab as a political statement and want to liberate women in countries such as Afghanistan’.

(Female, 23, Bow)

NORMALISE AND MAINSTREAM HIJAB

Further measures suggested, sought the government’s actions to normalise and mainstream Hijab beyond simply educating the public about it.

‘Incorporate hijab with public service uniforms.
Educate Muslim women’.

(Female, 20, Britain)

‘Explain and encourage it’.

(Female, 20, London)

This would include more facilities for women who observe Hijab or indeed who sought women only space:

‘After consulting some Muslim sisters we concluded more access to physical activities e.g. leisure centres etc. giving times in gyms and swimming pools for women who observe Islamic principle of covering, no music etc. multi faith rooms in town city centre’s where Muslims can pray if necessary’.

(Female, 26, Loughborough)

‘Create restaurants without men, more jobs where sectors are secluded for men’.

(Female, 22, St Albans)

‘Make clear to every employer that hijab is part of life for British Muslim women and greater debate and discussion between Muslims and non-Muslims’.

(Female, 21, Manchester)

The fostering of employment opportunities was the main concern expressed, with the expectation indicating that barriers to integration in the workplace were seen to be set by employers, either through prejudicial policies or through creating an atmosphere that put Muslim women off applying. In this regard the government was encouraged by one respondent aged 20 from London to be more proactive and start disabusing itself of certain prejudices and then taking that message to employers: ‘Read up on Islam rather than listen to garbage on the TV. Understand why women wear Hijab and encourage work places to employ women who want to wear it.’



‘They [the government] should establish a law that requires every employer a certain amount of women who wear the hijab, prosecute anyone who discriminates, send positive messages about the hijab (and the right to wear it) via the media’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘I suppose some sort of scheme to encourage them to do so. If, they could do something at a governmental level to encourage employers/British women to mix/be compatible with each other. Employers could be more appealing to the Muslim woman’.

(Female, England)

Given that religious discrimination in the workplace is already outlawed as a result of the implementation of the EU directive (Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation), it is important to note that those affected by the very problems such legislation is designed to help, see no support from the government for these measures.

RELIGIOUS EQUALITY

Closely related was the call for religious equality measures which extended beyond employment, and also beyond legislation.

‘Anti-religious discrimination act – inclusive of Muslims’

(Female, 19, Preston)

‘As the British government says everyone is equal no matter what religion you are, then they should treat Muslim women with this equality’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘To give them the same chances that are given to the others and look at their knowledge, not at their dress or fashion’.

(Female, 38, London)

‘Not discourage being Muslim’.

(Female, 24, London)

As with previous volumes, respondents were concerned about the role of the media and again concerns about the media figured highly in Muslims’ expectations regarding wearing Hijab.

‘Not to give a negative impression of Muslim women and Islam through the media.

They should approach the public with more facts about Islam and more documentaries of Muslim women who are in fact liberated by wearing the hijab’.

(Female, 18, London)

‘The media should try and send the right message to the public about Muslim women and not make them come across as illiterate, oppressed slaves to men. Maybe this will help the British public respect her more and accept her as part of a working community’.

(Female, 20, London)

‘The media stereotyping, the most insidious and damaging practice should be put a stop to.’

(Female, 50, Watford)

The expectation of some action regarding media stereotyping and using the media to promote a message of tolerance is one of huge significance. Most Muslim women in the UK expect that the government will take to task those who create stereotypes or at least tackle the problems created by them for Muslim women. The expectation of significant action inheres in responses and needs to be taken on board by policymakers with a renewed sense of urgency. One 23 year old female from Edinburgh expressed her expectation based on her understanding between media and government:

“Leave them [Muslim women in hijab] alone, do not make it an issue, let them be! And not let the media highlight some negative sides that are attached to the Hijab, as I believe there are only few, and we all know the government rules the media.”

COMMENTS FROM COMMUNITY FIGURES

IHRC asked a number of respected activists and academics for their thoughts on Hijab: what it means, what the government should do for Muslim women who wear it, what effect does banning it have and could it have, and who is to blame for stereotypes about Muslim women.

RAJNAARA AKHTAR,
CO-ORDINATOR, PRO-HIJAB CAMPAIGN GROUP,
LEICESTER

The Hijab is more than a piece of cloth that covers the hair, neck and chest of a woman, it is an act of worship in response to the Qur’anic commandment that a woman should cover herself in this way so that she can be recognised as a Muslim woman and protected as such. The action of wearing the Hijab is in response to the commandment of Allah swt and therefore a personal act of worship by Muslim women. The fact that it is a visible ‘symbol’ of her status as a Muslim is simply one of the results of the Hijab. The Hijab acts as a barrier in many regards, and ensures that a woman’s honour and dignity is protected, thus elevating women from being seen as objects, to real human beings to be treated with respect. Thus the Hijab is not a symbol of oppression as so easily misconceived in Western societies – it must be noted that this misconception arises from the place of the head covering in Christian traditions where it was very much a means to subjugate women. The Hijab on the other hand, from its very inception, was treated as a liberation for women from the shackles of a societies that treated them as mere objects.

I fully support legislation that seeks to protect the right of Muslim women to wear the Hijab, just as followers of the Sikh religion should have their right to wear the turban protected. I vigorously oppose any legislation that seeks to ban the Hijab, on any grounds, as it is an infringement of religious freedoms enshrined in the European convention of human rights.

If women are forced out of the Hijab, a two-tier society would be created as Muslim women would be forced out of public life, thus giving rise to greater misconceptions about Muslims and increased ghettoisation where Muslim families, often led by their women, do not feel a part of the greater society. This is not in the interests of integration or equality of all people.

British society is an open and receptive one where multiculturalism is concerned. I expect the British government to encourage this through its policies, which thus far it has done by vowing to protect the right of Muslim women to wear it.

However, some institutions (most recently Imperial College London) are making noises in the direction of Hijab bans, or the ban of other religious dress. I would expect government ministers from relevant departments such as the education department to denounce such steps as they will create divisions on campus.

MILENA BUYUM,

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AGAINST RACISM (NAAR)

CO-ORDINATOR, LONDON

As a non-Muslim woman, it is difficult for me to answer what the hijab means. However, I have been in discussions with Muslim women who wear the hijab as part of our organisation's (National Assembly Against Racism) solidarity with the Muslim women who oppose the ban in France and our perspective is from a woman's right to choose. I understand that there are many reasons for which some Muslim women choose to wear it and they are all valid reasons. We believe Muslim women should have the right to choose to wear – or not to wear – the hijab.

There are many negative stereotypes circulating in society about hijab. It is suggested that wearing the hijab is an exterior sign of extreme religious views and women who wear the hijab are proselytising, i.e. attempting to convert non Muslims through asserting their religion in a visible way. Of course, these are not true for the vast majority of women who choose to wear the hijab, who refer to the wearing of hijab as a liberating experience, which in no way hinders their full participation in society, on the contrary, they state hijab enables them to fully take part in education, employment and society at large. Growing racism towards Muslims is responsible for the stereotypes and they must be combated and myths dispelled. The best way to do this is to ensure Muslim women have a platform from which they can assert their experiences and ensure a fully informed debate. They must have the solidarity of all the positive and progressive forces who stand in favour of choice and civil liberties.

The government has made it clear around the time of the introduction of the French law that no such piece of legislation would be brought in Britain, a position that is welcomed by all those who want equality and respect for diversity.

It is important that the government ensures that myths over hijab are dispelled through its positive dialogue with Muslim communities and organisations.

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS,
GREEN PARTY MEP, SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

Stereotypes perpetuated by the media often portray all followers of Islam, including wearers of the Hijab, as radical extremists.

For Muslims, choosing to wear the Hijab is a way of expressing their commitment to Islamic beliefs, and for some Muslim women represents a way to protect their honour and dignity. Any legislation against the wearing of the Hijab by Muslim women would remove their freedom of personal expression and would impinge on their freedom to practice their religion- in opposition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The British Government should be expected to protect the right of each and every citizen to freely practice their religion, and to freely express themselves, which, for Muslim women, would uphold their right to chose to wear the Hijab if they so wish.

RUQAIYYAH WARIS MAQSOOD,
AUTHOR, HULL

Hijab means obedience to Allah's request for women who believe in Him to dress and behave modestly. In order to do this certain clothing become unacceptable, and others become convenient – but there is no set style or garment. It is the modest behaviour and character that is important (the *nass* principle), and how the principle is expressed is a matter for individual conscience and choice.

There are negative implications/stereotypes existing both within the Muslim communities and amongst non-Muslims. Some see hijab as oppressive – which it *is*, if it has been forced upon any woman by her family, husband, community etc etc. It should always be a matter of free choice.

Some women see *their* choice of hijab garments as being better than that of other Muslims, and can regard it as a kind of measure of their piety or devotion to God. This is shaky reasoning, as a woman could be completely covered up and yet be unkind, selfish, arrogant, unforgiving, etc etc. It is foolish to assume that wearing any particular sort of garment makes one a better Muslim.

If a woman refuses to have her face photographed for ID card or passport purposes it puts her under suspicion. I cannot see why a Muslim woman should have any objection – just to show her face for the photo does not make her an immodest woman, or alter what she wants to wear at all. She should be prepared to show her face for ID purposes in the appropriate circumstances – surely it could be arranged for a woman official to check? I realise there is a problem over bus-passes.

I expect them to be fully aware that the vast majority of Muslim women *do* wear modest dress and usually some form of covering garment that marks them out as Muslim women. The issue of being identified as a Muslim women is one aspect of this important issue.

Muslim women believe that it is their first priority to obey the commands of God, rather than any orders of any human being, and so take the command for modesty very seriously. When ordered NOT to wear whatever it is they normally wear, they will resist and be upset.

I do expect the government to consider the fights of Muslim women to wear hijab cover whenever it is appropriate for them to do so.

DR. NASREEN NAWAZ ,
WOMEN'S MEDIA REPRESENTATIVE OF HIZB-UT
TAHRIR BRITAIN, LONDON

The hijab and jilbab are Islamic obligations for a Muslim woman, regardless of where she lives. She does not wear them as a personal expression of modesty or to protect her from harm but to fulfil a religious duty in a manner similar to the Islamic obligations of prayer and fasting.

The hijab and jilbab are therefore not worn as a political statement, nor are they an expression of religious extremism as described by some. Rather, they are an integral part of her identity as a Muslim woman. The vast majority of Muslim women - young and old who have adorned the hijab and jilbab have done so from their own religious convictions rather than through coercion from their parents or the male family members as portrayed by some. In fact, if Muslim women face any pressures, it is the pressure to not wear these garments due to the negative stereotypes associated with the dress, discrimination in education or employment or to conform to the norms of image and appearance.

Any legislation against the Muslim woman's right to wear the hijab and jilbab, whether in education, work, or within society generally would effectively legalize religious discrimination against Muslim women. It would impede the educational aspirations of thousands of Muslim women and could unjustly force Muslim women to choose between education and their religious beliefs or employment and their Islamic values.

Negative stereotypes have become prevalent within the society primarily through the media portrayal of Muslim women as well as through feminists and orientalist writers. However, politicians and high profile personalities are also to blame.

The British government should firstly understand that the hijab and jilbab are not a matter of custom and tradition but rather religious obligations for the Muslim woman. Accordingly, it should accept that she has the right to religious expression as well as to pursue a successful education and career without having to choose between these issues. Any government has the responsibility of protecting these fundamental rights for each and every one of its citizens, including the Muslim women. It is not acceptable for any government to accept any form of religious discrimination to exist within its schools, colleges, universities, workplaces, or society in general.

In addition, it has the responsibility of working to eradicate negative stereotypes that lead to prejudice, discrimination, and bigotry against Muslim women within society by ensuring the correct portrayal and teaching of Islam in schools and universities. It should also ensure that politicians do not add to this environment through irresponsible statements regarding Islam and women, including the position of women under Islamic governance.

SARAH SHERIFF,

**FOUNDING MEMBER AND TRUSTEE OF MUSLIM
WOMEN'S HELPLINE, RESPONDING IN AN INDIVIDUAL
CAPACITY, LONDON**

For some hijab is a religious obligation whose authority comes from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. For others it is statement about identity and affiliation to the global Islamic movement and liberation from slavery to western consumerism and materialism. Where Hijab was forcibly removed and banned, it is seen as an act of dissent from oppressive secularism. For yet others it is an outward expression of piety and humility. And it is a combination of these for many others.

On the other hand, some Muslims do not accept Hijab as being a religious requirement – they believe that no specific form of dress is specified in the original sources. Hijab is a voluntary expression of extra piety for these people. Some view Hijab as being an expression of submission as it is associated with the reality of women's position in particular societies. Where Hijab is imposed and women do not exercise free will in their dress, it can be seen as a symbol of oppression.

The blame for the existence of stereotypes lies in the history of the interaction between Islam and the non-Muslim world. It lies in the imperialism and neo-colonialism and the need to attack Islam through the means of its women. But it also lies in the fact that in the name of Islam, women do suffer oppression in some societies. The symbol of this oppression has been the form of dress imposed on women by those societies. It is therefore argued that part of the means of liberating women from their oppression is to liberate them from the required forms of dress. It is not seen on the other side that secularism can be just as fundamentalist and adult women and girls who voluntarily opt to don hijab as a personal expression of religious devotion and identity are exercising a choice that should be equally respected. This is not the case and secular societies can be illiberal and deny rights and choice to women who have a religious affiliation that is not accepted.

The British government should understand that choice should be respected and religious affiliation is a choice which should be equally respected and celebrated and not marginalised along with other freedoms of choice this country claims to uphold.

LAYLI UDDIN,

GRADUATE, LONDON

I think hijab is an act of worship for Muslim Women. There are various interpretations as to whether hijab is mandatory. I do not know the answer to this, but for me it is something that draws me closer to God and increases the intensity of my worship.

The stereotypes are really obvious: Muslim women are oppressed, subjugated by Muslim men, forced to wear the hijab against their will, second-class citizens etc. I really do not know who is to blame for them, maybe Muslims, press, politicians etc. I expect the British government to let us go on wearing it, I have not heard or seen anything different, call me naive or gullible.

HIJAB AS A THEOLOGICAL AND JURISPRUDENTIAL CONCEPT

The authors have left until last a discussion of Hijab from the viewpoints of various contemporary Muslim scholars. The following reflects the debates within Muslim circles regarding the Hijab and the foregoing findings and comments as well as the literature overviewed need to be evaluated in the light of the motivational aspects of Hijab wearing (or not) that may be gleaned from theological and jurisprudential perspectives of Hijab.

Hijab as part of a theological discourse is often overlooked in the literature. The reference point for most studies is socio-political and the failure to look at motivation driven by religious belief can be a key criticism of analysis of the effect of Hijab on those who wear it. (Jarrah 2003, Roald 2004, Ahmed: 1992). Approaches towards this issue tended to focus on arguments that the motivation for Muslim women to cover (where women were acknowledged as having agency) as bypassing sexual harassment and gaining respect (Roald 2004).

Jarrah (2003) has tried to approach the issue from a religious perspective. She went back to the Islamic sources and tried to reinterpret them and analyze the works of the traditional Muslims scholars from a critical point of view. However, her selective usage of the sources has undermined that effort. Her methodology pays great emphasis to the medieval Islamic social structure in which female slavery was widely spread. Arguing that contemporary Muslim scholars were influenced by this social order, she analyzes Al-Tabari's interpretation of the Qur'an and heavily criticize him for misinterpreting the relevant Qur'anic verses. Al-Tabari is a canonical exegete of the Qur'an from the 9th / 10th centuries CE and Jarrah's refutations are based not on exegesis but a type of commonsensical reasoning that does not tackle the interpretation from a recognised theological methodology (Kara 2005). Effectively she has been criticised for using sporadic and contestable examples of instances where women in early Islamic history have uncovered to undermine well-established rules based on Qur'an exegesis and ahadith science (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and the extrapolation of meaning and law through them).

Other notable writers and intellectuals who have become embroiled in debate about Hijab are Zahra Rahnavard, chancellor of Al-Zahra University in Tehran, Iran and Amina Wadud, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Wadud places emphasis on the idea that Hijab as a head covering has become identified with the personification of Islamic modesty in a way that is incorrect. Her objection to this discourse is based not on a disputation of Hijab as mandatory so much as the fact that it forms part of a way of being Islamically modest and is not the sole or only manifestation of modesty from an Islamic conceptual framework (2005). Rahnavard maintains that whilst Hijab is incumbent it carries no meaning if not worn as a result of conscious and reasoned choice (2000).

ISLAMIC TERMINOLOGY

Although there are variety of usages for the head-cover in different societies, in the Qur'an there are three words in three different verses used on the issue of covering of women. The verses are:

“And when you ask anything of [his] womenfolk, ask it from them behind a curtain (hijab). That is more chaste for your hearts and their heart. You may not torment the Apostle of Allah, nor may you ever marry his wives after him. Indeed that would be a grave [matter] with Allah.” (Q. 33:53).

“O prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the faithful to draw closely over themselves their chadors (jelabib singular jilbab). That makes it likely for them to be recognized and not to be troubled...” (Q. 33:59)

“And tell the faithful women to cast down their looks and to guard their private parts, and do not to display their charms, expect for what is outward, and let them draw their veils (khumur singular khimar) over their bosoms, and not display their charms expect to their husbands, or their fathers ...” (Q. 24:31)

As we see *Hijab*, *jilbab* and *khimar* are used in the verses and it can be noticed from the context referred to different meanings.

In the first verse the term *Hijab*, used in the meaning of curtain that secluded the wives of the prophet from the public. In the second verse the term *jilbab* used in the meaning of chador or cloak that would help to cover women when they are in the public. In the third verse the term *khimar* is used for the head-cover. The overwhelming majority of exegetes and jurists agree that this verse clearly mentions that faithful women should draw their already existing head-cover over their bosoms, based on Qur’anic exegesis that uses ahadith science to extrapolate and elucidate meaning¹⁵. It is clear that the Qur’an chooses the word of *khimar*, as relating to head covering.

In modern day discussions however there is no mention of *khimar* at all. Instead of *khimar* there is a great emphasize on the term *Hijab* which gives the idea of a woman being placed behind a curtain. This situation drew Ayatollah Mutahhari’s attention who tried to find an answer as to the popular usage of the term of Hijab. In his work, he states that:

“But there is a question as to why, in the recent era, did the current expression of the religious jurists, that is *satr* (a technical word that is used for covering body and includes the other words) not become prevalent instead of ‘*hijab*’? The reason is unknown to me. Perhaps they mistook the Islamic *hijab* for the *hijab* which is traditional in other countries” (Mutahhari 1987, p.13).

El-Guindi’s work might be helpful in order to get an answer. In her book El-Guindi states that:

“When the veil became the centre of the feminist/nationalist discourse in Egypt during the British colonial occupation, hijab was the term used by feminists and nationalists and secularists. The phrase used for the removal of urban women’s face/head cover was *raf* (lifting) al- *hijab* (not *al-habarah* the term used for cloak/veil among upper-class Egyptian women at the turn of the century) (El-Guindi 1999, p. 153).

¹⁵

Arguments against this meaning of *khimar* have been made by some scholars and polemicists generally based on an argument that ahadith needs to be left out of interpretations of the Qur’an – a controversial and minority viewpoint.

It seems that there is deliberate usage of the term by the feminists/nationalist discourse since they do not use an already existing term *habarah* in the society. This is noted by Roald as well. In her discussion about feminist approach to head-cover she analyzes work of a prominent feminist Mernissi and her choice of terminology. And she states that:

“Her choice of the term *‘hijab’* might be explained by the fact that today it is often used to denote the female head-cover, but in the Qur’anic language it refers not to female clothing but to the curtain which was ordered to be set up between the prophet’s wives and the men in Medina. It might be that Mernissi is aware of this and wants to draw attention to the issue of segregation between men and women- the Muslim construction of a female versus a male world which might be seen as a consequence of the verse on hijab. But if she wants a word synonymous with ‘veil’, the Koranic term *khimar* is a more specific term used to denote a covering cloth worn by women. That Mernissi wants to portray the discussion of hijab as pertaining specifically to the Prophet’s wives is used, since she twists the meaning in such a way that the readers without sufficient knowledge of the text might be misled.” (Roald 2002, p. 260).

Having briefly touched the Qur’anic terminology it will be better to understand what these verses imply. There is no doubt that the first verse is specific to the Prophet’s family and does not apply to other Muslim women. This can be clearly noticed in the Qur’anic verse: *“O wives of the Prophet! Whoever of you commits a gross indecency, her punishment shall be doubled, and that is easy for Allah. But whoever of you is obedient to Allah and His Apostle and acts righteously, We shall give her a twofold reward, and We hold a noble provision in store for her. O wives of Prophet! You are not like any other women...”* (Q. 33:30,31,32)

Because of their special situation God decreed special rulings for them, as the verse reveals they were told to remain in the house and they were also banned from marrying another person after the Prophet’s (s.a.) death. Therefore, Muslim women are exempted from the commandment of the abovementioned verse.

In the second verse Muslim women along with the Prophet’s wives and daughters are ordered to dress in a fully covering garment when they are in public. The reason cited in the verse is that they might be recognized as faithful women and not be troubled. (Mutahhari 1987)

In the context of the third verse it is clearly understood that Muslim women were ordered to draw their already existing head-cover (*khimar*) over their bosoms and not to display their charms except what is apparent. Although it is clear that Muslim women should cover their heads, there is a dispute among contemporary Muslim scholars regarding what is apparent? The answer often depends on what school of thought or which particular scholar one follows. According to the most of *Hanafi* school, and the *Jafari* and *Maliki schools of thought*, women are not obliged to cover their face and hands. On the other hand, those who follow the *Shafi*, *Hanbali* and *Salafi schools of thought* maintain that a woman has to be fully veiled. (Khan&Khanam 1995), (Ma’sumi 2000)

As for other scholars, some such as Abul A’la Madudi (1972), Mohammed Ismail Memon Madani (2000), Abdul Rahman Abdullah (1999), Halah Bint Abdullah, Ayatullah al-Khou’i (Rizvi; 1992) believed that the meaning of ‘apparent’ is everything except the eyes. Therefore, the verdict is that it is obligatory for women to cover these parts in public. On the other hand,

Imam Khomeini (2001), Murtaza Mutahhari (1987), Ayatollah Sistani, M. al-Ghazzali, Yusuf al-Qardawi, Sheikh Darsh and Jamal Badawi believe that women do not have to cover their face and hands.

These differences arise due to different readings and understandings of the religious sources of different scholars. There is nothing wrong with it since in Islamic Law everybody has the right to follow a different school of thought or scholar. If one is not happy with the opinion of the school of thought or scholar, he/she can easily shift to another school of thought or scholar.

Causes where the removal of Hijab is religiously mandated are considered to involve life or death situations. The use by Sheikh Tantawi of Al-Azhar University of the religious injunction upon Muslims to follow the law of the land they reside in to mandate the removal of Hijab by schoolgirls in France¹⁶ fell foul of other jurisprudents, including those based at Al-Azhar University, who argued that Tantawi forgot that this rule is not applicable in the case of a conflict between the religious ruling and the law of non-Muslim country.

The reflection of the variety of Islamic theological and jurisprudential views, found in the findings of this research and their importance as part of the motivations and understanding of respondents, needs to be taken into consideration in any analysis of this research's findings. As feminist anthropologist Nicole Polier (1998) remarks in her study of the life of a Papuan woman Stella, feminists and for our purposes those here concerned with Hijab, need to understand that women don't always do, or believe in what we want them to, but that this in a way lessens their agency or invalidates their experiences as transformative in a gender and political context.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A high sense of individualism was displayed throughout the questionnaires, with respondents moving between issues of Muslim (group) identity and that of highly individualistic aspiration and accountability. Findings outlined above, saw women ready to protest and fight Hijab bans, invoking liberal notions of self and self-realisation through Hijab that belie notions that Muslims do not have or have a poorly developed sense of individuality (see Kramer, 2003). Other examples of this include strongly critical responses centering on Muslim behaviour, belying once more the idea that there is a single communitarian Muslim mindset that exists world over. This was notable in that as well as invoking a rights discourse and demanding accountability from the establishment as a result, respondents saw the need for change and transformation amongst minorities.

Clearly this sample indicates that there are varied and sophisticated responses from Muslim women, but that there is a growing experience of being a Muslim woman in the UK that conforms to certain, sadly, negative experiences. This is consistent with previous surveys in this series where Muslims nationwide – though not always adhering to the idea of a single Muslim community – distinguished that was increasingly a common Muslim experience in the UK.

¹⁶

He said: "In that case, if a Muslim woman observes the laws of a non-Muslim state, then from the point of view of Islamic law, she has the status of acting under coercion." (Aljazeera.net2003)

The pervasiveness of discrimination, to the extent that a certain amount had become tolerable was a disturbing finding in this report. The fact that employers or teachers insulting or acting prejudicially against people could not be taken as an example of discrimination or hostility of note indicates a level of acclimatisation to injustice that no government that truly believes in equality should tolerate. When questioned more specifically on incidents of discrimination or hostility – ridicule and prejudice from peers, politicians and the media included - a clearer picture of everyday experience pre and post 9/11 appears, as ridden with examples of prejudice that would shame any nation.

Stereotyping epitomised by media vilification and ridicule in many responses has profound effects on the everyday lives of Muslim women, whose engagement with the mainstream seems to be replete with examples of extremism. Whilst many extremely positive responses based around the Hijab were reported, equally devastating examples of rejection, isolation and an endless struggle to prove pervasive stereotypes wrong should ring alarm bells with government. As some respondents have indicated, the government itself and high ranking political figures are not free from the charge that they too have vilified, ridiculed or even proposed or enacted policy that is deeply detrimental to the values and well-being of Muslims – and so by extension – unhealthy for a diverse society that should be moving towards cohesion and not as it seems polarisation.

The position of the government is perceived to be at best equivocal over the issue of Hijab, including over its support for legislation already passed that should help Muslim women who wear Hijab, and indeed those who do not, secure equality at work. The lack of clarification indicates the government itself is divided between supporters of equality for all ethnicities and adherents to all religions, and those who would rather have different rules apply to different communities.

Given recent events and the government's increasing focus on Muslims, it should start listening to the findings of these reports if it is to truly engage with all communities in this country and work towards a secure and cohesive society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOGNISE - WITHOUT RESERVATION OR HESITATION - THE RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OF MUSLIM WOMEN.

As part of a wider discourse that exists around what constitutes recognized religious obligations, the recognition of Hijab as a religious obligation similar to that of praying five times a day or fasting needs to be made by the government so as to facilitate their accommodation in wider society. This is a moral imperative. This needs recognition at a conceptual level before its realization in law can have any meaning. Whilst the current British government has been keen to promote human rights speak from its outset, it has been equivocal in its stance on religious rights. The failure by erstwhile education, home, employment and women's ministers to state their support for religious rights has made the enactment of the Human Rights Act meaningless for Muslims trying to claim their rights through the courts.

The effect of guaranteed and recognized human rights for Muslims would provide them with the recognition of their belonging to wider society and would help facilitate better integration and engagement with wider society. As the findings indicate, the desire for integration amongst Muslim women, particularly their aspirations towards employment, seem to be frustrated not by self-imposed barriers relating to Hijab but by perceptions that pervade wider society and sadly the prejudice that also prevails.

Situations where Muslim women are compelled to remove their Hijab or suffer the consequences still exist today in the UK – these are humiliating, abusive and cruel situations for any woman who believes in Hijab to be placed in, and it is also the expression of Islamophobic hatred that scars collective Muslim psyches and strengthens anti-Muslim mindsets be they right-wing, liberal, religious or other.

The facilitation of religious observance in public and social life extends beyond the Hijab and includes e.g. prayer rooms facilities in public institutions, again with an eye on the requirements of female Hijab. Often where prayer rooms exist no thought is given to the fact that some worshippers may be women who wish to be segregated from men.

RECOGNIZING DIVERSITY AND THE RIGHT OF MUSLIM SELF-EXPRESSION IN HIJAB

The wearing of niqab is also considered, in various schools of thought within Islam, to be an obligation. Therefore those who do choose to wear it should not be castigated. Where Hijab has been accepted as part of uniforms or codes of practice, there has been at times a tendency to impose a particular kind of Hijab on all students regardless of their other cultural or religious beliefs. In this respect, an enforcement of a type of Hijab on e.g. all Muslim students in a school, or all female Muslim employees in a supermarket chain, becomes another form of coercion that contravenes a person's religious beliefs. It is important for the state and its policymakers to not become embroiled in often culturally charged theological debates and occasionally sectarian strife over what constitutes 'proper' religious practice.

The emphasis should be on facilitating religious rights – an expectation clearly articulated by respondents that forms part of a human rights language spoken by this government.

HAVE A NATIONAL POLICY ON INCORPORATING HIJAB INTO UNIFORMS IN BOTH THE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT SECTOR.

Again, this facilitates inclusion into the mainstream. At a time when segregation is being raised as a looming spectre in British society, simple barriers to integration need to be quickly eradicated. Allowing pupils or employees to wear Hijab is part of that step, best practice demands creative thinking around the subject.

Examples of exemplary initiative already exist, from a leading furniture chain contacting an on-line Hijab store to specially design matching headcovers, to schools asking local seamstresses to make matching scarves in uniform colours. This is a step towards mainstreaming Hijab – these employees and pupils have their dress code endorsed by the school they attend or establishment they work for. There is a sense of reciprocal pride exhibited in such policies that encourages Muslim women to be seen as part of something, not just ‘tolerated’.

THAT HIJAB IS NOT ALLOWED TO BE A BARRIER TO PARTICIPATION IN SPORT OR (OTHER) LEISURE ACTIVITIES

There are two facets to this recommendation. The emphasis placed on healthier lifestyles is not lost on Muslim women. They time and again stressed the need for women only leisure facilities where they could participate. Such facilities actually also cater for other women from minorities and indeed the majority. A recent study on female students at school found that many did not participate in physical education lessons because they did not like to wear a skimpy sports kit and did not like the adverse attention they received from male peers.

Women only facilities exists in some areas, but clearly the need for women only leisure space is key to the successful and equal provision of service to all women. In this respect, Muslim women are freer to articulate what many women feel about mixed leisure facilities and sports’ space.

Whilst there is a lack of such opportunities and where e.g. students finds themselves in a situation where a school claims it can only facilitate mixed swimming lessons, women must not be penalized for their religious objections to such participation.

The second facet to this recommendation places emphasis on women in sport professionally. Many Muslim women also have sporting aspirations, and there are examples world-wide of martial arts champions, footballers and mountain climbers to name but a few who all don the Hijab. The spurious and often incorrect statement that Hijab is a health and safety risk has often stopped Muslim women’s participation in competitive sport. The inclusion of women’s only space into competitive sport may also be a strategy that policymakers looking to increase the fitness of the nation and encourage sporting excellence may want to look into.

WOMEN ONLY SPACES IN PUBLIC PLACES

Baby changing and feeding rooms already exist in many shopping centres, airports and individual shops. Of varying standards such facilities need to be increased and their standards of hygiene maintained and their general standards reviewed.

Other facilities e.g. individual and not communal changing rooms in shops, fully curtained or covered changing cubicles etc. are all points of policy that not only facilitate participation and comfort for Muslim women but all women, and make sound business sense.

TALKING RESPONSIBLY

It is a shocking matter for consideration but sadly politicians in particular are perceived to be the locus of many publicly stated anti-Muslims sentiments. In other cases public figures are perceived to speak things ,without thinking about Muslim women, that in fact further stereotype them. The use of the Muslim woman in burqa as a *raison d'être* of military action in Afghanistan, the use of imagery that could easily be mistaken for a Muslim woman in niqab to alert people to the dangers of terrorism, are but two examples of how Muslim women have been characterised in recent years.

As a result, we are seeing e.g. bans on niqab on some university campuses on the pretext of security issues. This is a very real and frightening example of how prejudice and stereotyping are manifesting themselves at a policy level.

Part of this process requires political parties to reign in those who speak irresponsibly, whether it be by equating Muslims to Nazis, asserting that Muslim women need liberating or claiming that Muslims fit a terrorist profile. The fact that such remarks are made by senior politicians and even Ministers in recent months, is an indictment of the political establishment's claim that social cohesion and community harmony are a key goal.

Another part of this process is to critically appraise where stereotypes come from, in particular, through institutions and organisations. If any part of the governmental structure propounds the idea that any section of society have indelible traits of latent criminality then the British government needs to interrogate with vigour such contentions rather than simply taking them on board wholeheartedly. Whether it is the Metropolitan Police Service or minority group think tanks, such stereotyping should not become the basis of policy by virtue of its provenance from 'respected' or 'established' institutions and organizations. The pervasiveness of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim stereotyping, again highlighted in the findings and their dislocations from the prevalent literature, as well as the painful journey this country has faced in coming to terms with institutionalized prejudice, requires responsible government to take action to counter the normalization of such ideas.

SHOWING SOLIDARITY WITH THOSE WHO WEAR HIJAB ABROAD

Supporting the religious rights of minorities at home needs to be matched and supported by a vibrant foreign policy that supports those rights abroad. The British government's foreign policies have been open to many charges, and double standards be they on individual or thematic cases is but one of many. Whilst the Foreign office has been known to take a stand on cases of

foreign nationals who have converted to other faiths abroad and faced persecution, it has failed in cases where British nationals working abroad have converted to Islam and then faced problems e.g. in France. This is a recurring theme of cases of complaints reported to IHRC with British consular officials in some countries being the perpetrators of such discrimination.

These anomalies aside, the striking silence of condemnation at Hijab bans e.g. in Turkey, Tunisia, France and elsewhere again has repercussions for religious minorities here. It creates the possibility of discussion of such options in this country. After the French ban in schools in 2003 and a previous ban in Singaporean schools in 2001, the BBC website ran polls on whether its readers thought Hijab should be banned in schools. This puts religious rights into the realm of the negotiable, as if the rights of peoples (some over others) can be decided by public opinion. In the absence of an ideal speech situation such debates always favour the powerful over the powerless, in this case clearly those against whom anti-human rights policies have been implemented.

As a member of the EU, the government needs to ensure that Turkey's entry into the EU is resisted until it ensures respect for all human rights, including the right to freely practice one's religion under Article 9 of the ECHR.

MARKETING AND MAINSTREAMING THE HIJAB

Whilst governmental programmes on positive images have become a feature of funding rounds, government departments need to undertake serious consultation with Muslim women and make attempts to hear what they are actually saying, rather than what they feel they have to say to get any sort of audience with those in power.

The government needs to promote as a symbol of education, freedom and integration to counter stereotypes of backwardness, oppression, isolation and extremism, e.g. through an advertising campaign or a government endorsed national Hijab day.

TACKLING THE MEDIA

Finally, as most respondents have raised time and again, the role of the media in perpetuating stereotypes is a moral problem that is impacting on the daily lives of Muslim women. The government needs to look at effective regulation measures for the media that balance the rights to free speech with the rights not to be vilified and demonised. Current proposals regarding incitement to religious hatred are a red herring in this debate. As with previous legislation against incitement to racial hatred, we can expect, if enacted, this law to be disproportionately used against the very minorities it ought to protect.

The government needs to ensure that inroads into the culture of hatred and prejudice that permeates the media is tackled by the media, but also that the media be held accountable effectively where things go wrong. Where an institution like the BBC has a subsidised mandate to educate and entertain, the absence of diverse minorities' faces in news, drama and other facets of programming needs to be investigated and attempts at solutions found that neither patronise those marginalised or enforce targets and hard and fast rules. In their initial stages such enquiries need to problematise and make

media institutions aware of some of the deep concerns about stereotyping and their effect. A test of the seriousness of media establishments to adhere to a normative code of some sort can be assessed based on the outcomes of such problematisation.

If no series action is forthcoming, then government does need to think seriously about policy initiatives that impact on the media to stop the descent into mass demonisation that we currently face.

It is an extreme measure but it reflects the extremity of vilification currently faced by some of the most marginalised voices in the UK today.

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"If we are to work towards a truly egalitarian society we need to have the courage to problematise and interrogate our conceptions of each other and what motivates us." So begins this study of the meaning of the hijab to the Islamic community, to Muslim men, and, most importantly, to the Muslim women who choose to wear the headscarf.

In recent years, the hijab has been (mis)represented by many writers as a sign of the "clash of civilisations", of extremism, and of inequality. This study offers not only a scientific response but a personal one, allowing those who choose to wear the hijab to express their opinions and their identities. As one respondent offers from her religious and cultural perspective, "for me hijab is part of my worship and identity. Hijab is quite liberating, forces me to rely on the inside rather than on the outside."

This book should not be the final word on the issue of the hijab - it does not seek to be. Rather, in its presentation of the views of individuals who too often are treated as inferior or threatening, it makes a contribution which should be heard by all of us, Muslim or non-Muslim. If as one respondent argues, "British society is an open and receptive one where multi-culturalism is concerned", then these voices in this volume deserve respect and acknowledgement.

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