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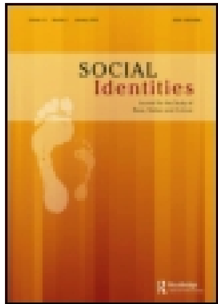

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Barbara Perry[a]
[a] Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Oshawa, ON, Canada
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Gendered Islamophobia: hate crime against Muslim women

Barbara Perry*

Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Oshawa, ON, Canada

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Post 9/11, most western nations have seen dramatic increases in bias motivated violence against Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim. Predicated on the long-lived vilification of Muslims by the media and the state, such violence is a reactionary reminder of Muslims' outsider status. Interestingly, little attention has been paid to the particular vulnerability of women and girls to anti-Muslim hate crime. This paper begins such a dialogue.

Keywords: hate crime; Islamophobia; gendered violence

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> To name only the ethnic hatred is to make gender hatred invisible. It names the gender violence as something different from hatred. It normalizes the violence against women by not naming it. This invisibility of violence toward women sustains it. (Zillah Eisenstein, 2006, p. 26)

Generally, women are not particularly vulnerable to hate crime. Just as the majority of perpetrators are male, so too are the majority of victims. However, this is not the case within the Muslim community. There, women and girls appear to be extremely vulnerable to violence motivated by their status as Muslims, but especially as Muslim women. In part, this is due to the fact that those who are covered, in particular, are readily identifiable. Yet it also has to do with the controlling images of Muslims, women, and Muslim women that render the latter especially attractive and available targets.

To understand the hate crime experienced by Muslim women, it is necessary to understand the multiple subject positions they occupy, with particular attention to their cultural identities and their gender. Thus, in what follows, I explore first, bias motivated violence against Muslims and those perceived to be Muslims, and secondly, gendered violence against women. This allows us, then, to move on to discuss the intersectionality of religion, race, and gender which makes women vulnerable to complex patterns of bias motivated violence. The patterns that are described here tend to be replicated across western nations, such as the UK, Australia, Canada and the US. While the emphasis here is largely on America, I also draw on emerging scholarship across other western nations as well.

Motive forces: anti-Muslim imaging

Prior to the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington DC in 2001, Muslims were not generally recognized as frequent targets of racially or religiously motivated

*Email: Barbara.perry@uoit.ca

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violence. In the US, for example, they were far outstripped by violence directed toward African Americans, Latinos and Jews. Yet that has changed since September 2001. The reaction was immediate. In the US, within 24 hours of the attacks, as many as eight homicides were attributed to racially motivated, reactionary violence. Most major cities experienced a rash of hate crime, ranging in seriousness from verbal abuse to graffiti and vandalism to arson and murder. By 18 September 2001, the FBI was investigating more than 40 possible hate crimes thought to be related to the terrorist attacks; by 3 October, they were investigating more than 90; the number had leapt to 145 by 11 October. The Muslim Public Affairs Council of Southern California reported 800 cases nationwide by mid-October, and the ADC (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee) had recorded over 1100 such offenses by mid-November.

The underpinnings of anti-Muslim violence are the invocation of negative images and stereotypes associated with Muslims. The slogans that often accompany the violence – ‘Go home?’ ‘You are not American!’ – reveal a strong sense of the illegitimacy of Arab residence in the west along with a similarly strong desire for revenge. Thus, while the current wave of anti-Muslim violence clearly was motivated by anger and outrage at the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it is also informed by a broader history and culture that supports anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-Middle East sentiments. Muslims and Arabs in general have a long, if largely unknown, history of defamation, violence, and non-violent discrimination in the US. Moreover, the past and current patterns are nested in an array of cultural and political practices that enable the hostility to fester, and violence to ensue.

Foremost among the motivating forces shaping bias-motivated violence generally are ideologies and images that mark the Other, and the boundaries between self and Other, in such a way as to normalize the corresponding inequities. It is within the cultural realm that we find the justifications for these inequities, and for ethnoviolence. For it is this body of discourse which articulates the relations of superiority/inferiority, thereby establishing a hospitable environment for openly racist activity. In line with an essentialist understanding of racial classification, the overriding ideology is that of inscribed traits, wherein ‘the stereotypes confine them to a nature which is often attached in some way to their bodies, and which thus cannot easily be denied’ (Young, 1990, p. 59). The ‘New Racism’ (Barker, 1981) tends to see such characteristics less in biological and more in cultural terms, but nevertheless conceives the boundaries between cultures as relatively fixed and immutable, resulting effectively in a similar essentialism.

Stereotypes which distinguish the racialized Other from white subjects are thus grounded in what are held to be the identifying features of racial minorities. They help to distance white from not-white. Here ‘white’ may be a metaphor for western or non-‘Third-World-looking’, rather than a matter of skin pigmentation or other such phenotype (Hage, 1998). The latter are to be feared, ridiculed, and loathed for their difference as recognized in the popular psyche. Almost invariably, the stereotypes are loaded with disparaging associations, suggesting inferiority, irresponsibility, immorality, and non-humanness, for example. Consequently, they provide both motive and rationale for injurious verbal and physical assaults on minority groups. Acting upon these interpretations allows dominant group members to recreate whiteness as superiority, while punishing the Other for their presumed traits and behaviours. The active construction of whiteness, then, exploits stereotypes to justify violence.

Such negative constructions of Islam undoubtedly provide motivation for the victimization of Muslims in most Western nations. In fact, many commentators have suggested that Arabs generally and Muslims specifically may represent the last ‘legitimate’ subjects

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of slanderous imagery and stereotypes (Abraham, 1994; Said, 1997; Stockton, 1994; Suleiman, 1999). For example, Moore (1995, p. 16) observes that,

> Crude caricatures of Muslims appear abundantly in the production and organization of popular culture. Events and situations, whether fictional or real, are presented to us within a framework of symbols, concepts, and images through which we mediate our understanding about reality … The news and entertainment media both generate stereotypes and rely on our familiarity with them in order to formulate the world in their terms and communicate ideas in an efficient, i.e., timely, fashion.

As Moore suggests, the media are especially complicit in the dissemination of anti-Muslim imagery. The widespread perpetuation of such caricatures – by the media and by public figures – fuels sentiments of suspicion and mistrust by shaping public perceptions in less than favourable ways. There are few, if any, positive images of Arabs, Muslims, or Middle Easterners generally. Rather they are portrayed collectively as wholly evil and warlike. Based on his observations of cartoons and other public media, Stockton (1994) has identified eight 'assigned image themes' that consistently appear in depictions of Arabs: sexual depravity (e.g., harems and belly dancers), creature analogies (e.g., vermin, camels), physiological and psychological traits (e.g., unappealing physical characteristics, fanaticism, vengeance), savage leaders (e.g., warmongers), deceit (in business and politics), secret power (e.g., use of oil wealth to manipulate others, especially the West), hatred of Israel, and terrorism.

In a 2002 nationwide survey of some 300 Canadian Muslims of South Asian, Arab, African and European background, CAIR-CAN found that 55% of respondents thought the Canadian media were more biased since 9/11. The report remarked on 'A startling similarity between media myths on Islam and Muslims and the hate-text of many documented anti-Muslim incidents' (Khan, Saloojee & Al-Shalchi, 2004). Disparaging and inflammatory coverage of Islam, tending to emphasize extremist 'tendencies' is endemic. Writing of Canada, for example, Ismael and Measor (2003) observe that, after 9/11,

> The blend of the xenophobic fears of the 'other', and that of terrorism, provided media consumers in Canada with a clear path to the conclusion that Islam was a faith in which acts of unspeakable violence were acceptable and that terrorism was endemic to Muslim and Arab culture. This framed Arab and Muslim societies and individuals as somehow fundamentally different from the average Canadian. By refusing to represent the diversity of Islam as a faith, the obfuscation of its tenets, and through their lack of coverage of the articulated ideas of Muslims the world over endorsing peace and supportive of human rights, the media conducted reductive exercises of the highest order.

This did not begin in September 2001, they point out, but the 'war on terror' marked an intensification of existing Islamophobia in the media. It is also important to keep in mind that the patterns of anti-Muslim sentiment and activity that have characterized Canada, the US, Australia and other nations have a historical grounding. In the western world, anti-Muslim sentiment is not new. Rather, it is often latent, overshadowed by what are the typically more evident schisms among whites and blacks, Asians, and Aboriginal peoples, for example. Nonetheless, there exists a history of colonialist deprecation that provides the foundation for the current rash of anti-Muslim threats and intimidation: western preoccupation with things Islamic is episodic, to say the least; it seems to take moments of extreme gravity – the Arab-Israeli wars, the Palestinian Intifadas, the 1979

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revolution in Iran and the ensuing hostage crisis, the Gulf War of 1991, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon – to awaken its dormant interest. Little wonder, then, that Islam has been at the receiving end of so much stereotyping – depicted as intolerant, reactionary, fanatical, and, when resisted, violent. Such caricature notions of Islam rarely are far from the surface (Malley, 2001). As Malley contends, it is not uncommon for reactionary incidents to follow triggering events. In particular, the 30-year trend toward typifying Arabs as 'evil' or as 'terrorists' has yielded a similarly long history of backlash violence, of which the months following the September attacks are the most recent in a lengthy series of retaliatory violence directed toward US citizens and residents of Middle Eastern descent. Abraham (1994, p. 194) concurs: 'The pattern of jingoistic violence … had become fairly predictable. Events occurring in the Middle East, particularly violence against U.S. citizens, often trigger jingoistic violence against Arabs and others who could conceivably be confused with them, such as Muslims, Iranians, or Palestinians.' Abraham (1994, p. 193) characterizes such 'jingoistic racism' as a dangerous hybrid of 'knee-jerk patriotism and homegrown white racism toward non-European, non-Christian dark skinned peoples … spawned by political ignorance, false patriotism, and hyper ethnocentrism.'

A series of recent historic events that include the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center by Islamic revolutionaries, the ensuing US invasions of two predominantly Muslim countries (Afghanistan and Iraq) and President George Bush's vilification of two other Muslim countries (Iran and Syria) as 'evil,' have reinforced this tendency to vilify Muslims. For example, when survey respondents were asked 'when you hear the word Muslim, what comes to mind?' 32% used negative terms, many of which alluded to images of war, guns and violence. In addition, a stunning quarter of the respondents believed that Muslims teach their children to hate (Council on American-Islamic Relations [CAIR], 2006). The result has been a significant increase in blatant and often violent forms of religious persecution and discrimination of not only Muslims, but also of those associated with them, as well as those who appear to be Muslim but who are not.

Gendered hate crime

Few social scientists have applied a hate crime perspective to the problem of violence against women (DeKeseredy, 2008). Certainly, what Elizabeth Pendo (1994, p. 157) noted 15 years ago still holds true today. Not only has there been neglect of the issue; there is in fact, 'tremendous resistance to the recognition of gender-based violence against women as a hate crime and the institutionalized inequality which that resistance reflects.' For example, in the US, 24 states still do not include gender as a protected category in their hate crime statutes. In contrast, gender is included in Canada's sentencing enhancement statute (S.718) but it has never been the basis for a prosecution, in spite of the high rates of violence against women. Indeed, as Jenness (2003, pp. 82–83) observes, 'gender is best envisioned as a 'second-class citizen' in social, political, and legal discourse in the US that speaks directly to the larger problem of violence motivated by bigotry and manifest as discrimination (i.e., bias motivated violence).'

There are multiple points of dissent in the debate over whether any subset of violence against women should be considered a form of bias motivated crime. McPhail and DiNitto (2005, p. 1165) summarize the standard rationales for exclusion as follows:

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> Many women know their attackers (unlike hate crimes where perpetrators are usually strangers), violence against women is prevalent (unlike hate crimes, which occur less frequently), and special laws already address violence against women.

By now, each of these has been seriously challenged and largely refuted in the literature (e.g., Lynch, 2005; McPhail, 2002; McPhail & DiNitto, 2005; Pendo, 1994). In large part due to efforts of feminist and anti-violence activists, by the early part of the new millennium there has been an increasing recognition of the parallels between hate crime against women and that committed against more 'typical' victim classes (e.g., race, religion). According to McPhail (2002, p. 270), 'Violence against women fits the hate crime paradigm when women are selected as victims due to their gender … or due to the perpetrator's hatred of women.' Lynch (2005) provides an interesting typology by which to characterize violence as hate or bias motivated. She asks a series of questions:

> Does this crime use gender bias as motivation? Does/can the crime hurt beyond the initial victim to their entire social group? Does it send the dominant society-endorsed message onto the body of the target? In what ways is the perpetrator or dominant society rewarded for the crime? (Lynch, 2005, p. 7)

In her subsequent analysis, she argues that a great deal of gender violence can be characterized as arising out of gender animus. Some level of violence against women may, in fact be, indistinguishable from other hate crimes. Like racially or religiously motivated violence, for example, gender motivated violence is predicated upon widespread assumptions about gender appropriate behaviours. In particular, these assumptions revolve around essentialist constructions of gender which represent polar extremes inhabited by masculine and dominant men, and feminine, subordinate women. Violence is but one means by which men as a class enforce conformity of women as a class. Moreover, it is not necessary for all men to engage in violence against women, since the very threat of violent censure is constantly with women. Violence against women, then, is indeed a 'classic' form of hate crime, since it too terrorizes the collective by victimizing the individual. In so doing, hate crime against women reaffirms the privilege and superiority of the male perpetrator viz the female victim.

Feminist scholars acknowledge the parallel between violence against women – especially sexual violence – and lynching of black males (Brownmiller, 1975; Pendo, 1994) as means to exert control and identity. There is little difference in the broad motives. Both groups are victimized because of their identity, often for very similar illusionary 'violations:'

> … for being uppity, for getting out of line, for failing to recognize 'one's place,' for assuming sexual freedoms, or for behaving no more provocatively than walking down the wrong road at night in the wrong part of town and presenting a convenient isolated target for group hatred and rage. (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 281)

Just as racially motivated violence seeks to re-establish 'proper' alignment between racial groups, so too gender motivated violence is intended to put women back in 'their place.' Victims are chosen because of their gender and because of the assumptions about how they should enact their gender. The gender polarization that permeates so many Western

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cultures is taken as a 'natural' 'given' fact, wherein women are expected to be deferential. This dichotomy presupposes mutually exclusive scripts for males and females; it also defines any person or behavior that deviates from these scripts as problematic. Gender motivated violence is one readily available means by which men and women rehearse their scripts, ensuring that women act 'like women' in the bedroom, in the kitchen, in the workplace or on the street.

Gendered Islamophobia

Of course, the waters become even murkier and, in fact, stormier where gender intersects with other elements of identity. Regardless of the cultural background of women, it is highly likely that they become even more vulnerable to bias motivated violence when they can be 'othered.' Indeed, women of colour – or in this case, Muslim women – are feared and reviled on the same basis as all Muslims. Yet in addition, they are often constructed as racialized, exotic Others who do not fit the Western ideal of womanhood. Moreover, Crenshaw (1994) makes clear that women of colour are uniquely vulnerable to gendered violence because of their multiply determined structural disempowerment. They are often simultaneously oppressed by their class, gender, ethnic, racial and, here, religious position. Writing specifically of Muslim women, Abu-Ras and Suarez (2009, p. 59) highlight the complexity of these women's identities:

(1) their gender status as women, who generally face more discrimination in access to educational, financial, health, and social resources (cited in Bianchi, Casper & Peltola, 1996);
(2) their cultural identity that is shaped by structural social and cultural constraints provided by gender socialization and patriarchal processes, that also justify certain types of discrimination (cited in Essers & Benschop, 2009);
(3) their status as immigrants and minorities in a Western country and the resulting social and economic marginalization;
(4) their language barriers, which often result in loss of power, influence, and control over their family members (cited Predelli, 2004);
(5) their religious identity, which results in their separation from men and the wider society; and finally,
(6) their Islamic dress code (cited Haddad, 2007) that symbolizes modesty and physical integrity, and identifies them from non-Muslims, marking them as targets for hate crimes, discrimination, and possible violations of their bodily integrity.

Thus, it is because of the intersecting spaces that Muslim women occupy that they become vulnerable to violence, and in unique ways. For these women, the Islamophobic violence they experience is different in its dynamics and impacts from that perpetrated against Muslim men; yet their gendered violence is experienced in ways that are distinct from that experienced by differently raced women.

Evidence appears to be mounting that Muslim women may be unexpectedly vulnerable to Islamophobic violence. This is very much in contrast to the demographics of hate crime generally, which tend to target men disproportionately (excluding domestic violence). Recent reports suggest, however, that Muslim women are at elevated risk. For example, an Australian Community Relations Commission (Dreher, 2006) on post-9/11 experiences of Muslims found that 50.4% of the victims were female, whereas only

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44.4% were male (the remainder were institutions/buildings). Other, similar reports from Australia confirm this trend, as do some from the UK. Githens-Mazer and Lambert's (2010) London study also discovered that while racist violence typically targets men, Muslim women are more vulnerable to religiously motivated hate crime. Abu-Ras and Suarez's (2009) American study of the PTSD effects on Muslims after 9/11 found that a significantly larger proportion of women (86.3%) than men (54.9%) had experienced hate crime. Unfortunately, there has been little else published on this in North America.

Nonetheless, we can glean from anecdotal reports and from media representations the contexts in which Muslim women are most likely to be targets of bias motivated violence. The following are examples of the sorts of experiences Muslim women have had across the western world:

> Muslim parents complained that their 11-year-old daughter was harassed, humiliated, choked, and threatened with death by a sixth-grade boy. For over a week, he harassed her, punched her in her arms and shoulder, and once pressed her into a wall with his hands around her throat. He ripped off her hijab in science class, frightening her and causing her to cry. The next day he threatened to start rumors that she was a lesbian, and said he would get a BB gun and kill her. The girl said that the teacher witnessed the hijab incident, but told her that, before she would be allowed to move to a seat away from the boy, she would have to 'work for it.' Earlier in the school year, eighth-graders had taunted her for wearing the hijab, called her a terrorist, and 'asked if she was hiding any bombs.' (Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010, p. 54)

> A South Asian student at Baylor University was attacked on campus. The assailant grabbed her hijab, threw her to the ground, slapped and kicked her several times in the ribs, shouting 'Arabian (expletive)' and '(expletive) Muslims.' She suffered bruises and a dislocated shoulder. She had experienced previously harassment on campus because of her dress. (Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010, p. 56)

Embedded in the language and context of these illustrative examples, are insights into the constructs shaping violence against Muslim women. Interestingly, the motives for Islamophobic violence against women are both the same and different from those underlying violence against men. That is, they are informed by parallel negative images – 'Like Muslim males, she too bears the brunt of entrenched stereotypes profiling Muslims as the primary threat to American national security. But unlike her male counterpart, the headscarved Muslim woman is caught at the intersection of discrimination against religion and discrimination against women' (Aziz, 2012, p. 25). Like men, Muslim women are 'presented as outsiders: as foreign, distant "others," and as members of a religion (Islam) that does not promote "Canadian" values, but anti-Canadian values such as indiscriminate violence and gender oppression' (Bullock & Jafri, 2002, p. 35). Yet women are further subject to specific gendered constructs, which serve to Other them in very specific ways, ways that render them vulnerable to harassment and violence. In short, their position outside the boundaries of the dominant white, Christian culture means that they are less valued and thus less protected (Jiwani, 2005). In this way, 'gendered and racialized violence dictat(es) what "men", "women" and racialized categories such as "white", "black", "Arab/Muslim" or "oriental" are supposed to be and do' (Nayak, 2006, p. 47).

Bullock and Jafri (2002, p. 36; see also Posetti, 2007) highlight three 'personas' that Muslim women are thought to occupy in the popular imagination, and thus define what Muslim women 'are supposed to be and do':

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> The first is the 'harem belly-dancer character,' the mysterious and sexualized woman of the 'Orient'; the second is 'the oppressed Muslim woman,' often represented as the hijab (headscarf) wearer or the woman who is unable to drive; and, finally, there is the 'militant Muslim woman,' often shown in hijab with a gun and military clothes.

I turn now to discuss the ironies and implications of these characterizations as they inform violence against Muslim women.

Sexualized and assailable bodies

At the heart of Edward Said's (1978) thesis on orientalism is the notion of the exoticization and colonization of the Other through popularly held imagery. Historically, this has been central to the desirous gaze by which colonized women – including Muslims and Arabs – have been viewed. Early male travelers to the Middle East went with erotic fantasies in mind, having been fed images of the exotic beauty 'behind the veil', and thus sexualized expectations of women found there. Travel writers and 'explorers' published their accounts of the seductive and alluring women of the East. Postcards often carried images of scantily clad – but veiled – women in tempting poses. The fantasy lingers today, albeit in different form. As Agathangelou and Ling (2004, p. 528) describe it,

> the female Other remains a silent, inscrutable object of desire … Indeed, contemporary media outlets like National Geographic have popularized an image of the Muslim woman as a half-veiled, muted waif, eyeing the white-male world beseechingly and remotely. This motif reflects a long-standing, Orientalist tradition of treating the female Other as young (under-developed), appreciative (subordinate), and tantalizingly mysterious (unknowable).

Like many women of colour, Muslim women are sexualized, such that they are reduced to their bodies. And the body is, according to Eisenstein (2006, p. 186), 'a horribly powerful resource for those who wish to conquer, violate, humiliate, and shame.' Interestingly, the context in which this becomes most apparent is in depictions of female terrorists. While men are typically described as barbaric and dirty, women are often described in breathless terms as beautiful, striking, exotic. Their motives and activities seem less important than their physical appearance. There seems to be something provocative about beautiful and sexually enticing women when they are armed!

Muslim women's bodies become assailable because of their exotic allure, but also because of the threat that such attraction represents to white culture. They are not like 'our' women in ways that are at once titillating and disturbing, captivating and frightening. Violence can be a way to simultaneously avail oneself of what the foreign other offers, while nonetheless reinforcing the boundaries between 'us' and 'them.' Violence – whether verbal, physical or sexual – expresses 'both yearning for possession of and ability to degrade the exotic other' (Nayak, 2006, pp. 54–55).

Western perceptions of the veil exacerbate this dynamic. The veil enhances the allure; what is hidden becomes desired. Much as it symbolizes chasteness (see below), it also induces sexualized fantasies of what lies beneath. Ayotte and Husain (2005, pp. 120–121) write of 'titillating' titles and phrases often found in the media that speak to the western desire to denude Muslim women:

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> Other accounts of 'unveiling' objectify Afghan women with less than subtle sexual figurations. In a story on women living under the Taliban regime, Tom Brokaw enticed viewers by explaining that this story would provide 'a rare look behind the veil' ('Life of Women' 2001). The 60 Minutes II segment entitled 'Unveiled' promised that the viewer would meet young Afghan women who 'unveil more than just their faces.' ('Unveiled' 2001)

What could be more enticing – or sexual – than the promise implied here? It is, perhaps, no surprise then that so many attacks on Muslim women involve ripping off her hijab. To satisfy the male fantasy, she must be at least metaphorically stripped, unveiled and thus exposed.

Women in need of salvation

The nature of the violence to which Muslim women are subjected is telling in other ways. As noted earlier, the veil, the burqa, the hijab and other forms of covering are taken as the central identifier of the female Muslim body, and thus the sign of seductive, yet reviled difference. Consequently,

> While a male Muslim's ideology is not necessarily obvious from his dress, a female wearing a headscarf becomes an easy target for those fearing Islamic fundamentalists. Therefore, while individuals who are actually dangerous may remain potentially invisible, their pacifist, veiled sisters may be heavily scrutinized and potentially victimized. (Wing & Smith, 2006, p. 754)

There is a familiar dichotomy at play here. For white women, there is the duality of the Madonna/whore that characterizes their roles and identities. For black women, there is the Jezebel and Mammy distinction. So too there is a second contradictory piece to Muslim women's imposed identity. Juxtaposed to the wholly sexual 'belly dancer' is the wholly pure 'oppressed' woman in need of salvation.

Paradoxically, then, coverings are also the central reminders of women's place in Muslim cultures. And in the West, this is not a safe space. Although women have and continue to wear the veil for a variety of reasons, both cultural and political, in the West, it 'has remained a static colonial image that symbolizes Western superiority over Eastern backwardness' (Razak, 2008, p. 120). With this narrow understanding in mind, where western literature and popular commentary have paid attention to violence against Muslim women, they have done so as a means of drawing a line between the West and Islam, between 'progress' and 'backwardness,' between 'equality' and 'oppression' of women. In short, it has focused almost solely on violence perpetrated by their Muslim partners, brothers, or other male family members, and taken this as an inherent characteristic of Muslim 'culture.' Indeed, a search of electronic data bases for such terms as 'violence against Muslim women' brings up almost exclusively literature on private rather than public violence. Razak (2008, p. 4) reminds us how 'Muslim women have been singled out as needing protection from their violent and hyper-patriarchal men,' but evidently not from white perpetrators.

Ironically, this popular stereotype of the 'weak' victim has become part of the controlling image of Muslim women, and thus a trigger and key rationale not only for public violence against Muslims, but also for the 'war on terror.' The 'justness' of military action in Afghanistan in particular was certainly expressed as an attempt to root out terrorism. But especially after the WMD 'hoax' was revealed, supporters of the war

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turned to the narrative of saving Muslim women from their oppressors. Ironically, the patriarchal model of Islam was to be defeated by an alternative patriarchy: 'women are characterized primarily as victims in need of saving by the paternalistic masculinity of patriarchal social or governmental institutions. This formula extends to the realm of international relations, where "the heroic, just warrior is sometimes contrasted with a malignant, often racialized, masculinity attributed to the enemy"' (Ayotte & Husain, 2005, p. 122).

Covering has come to be seen as the primary symbol of this presumed oppression. Indeed, women who are covered are at a dramatically increased risk of violence (Kwan, 2008). Yet ironically, in the case of public violence, the presumptive victims of this oppression also become victims of Islamophobic violence. It is a playing out of a victim-blaming scenario, wherein Muslim women are punished for succumbing to patriarchal pressures to remain concealed. Again, they are 'not like our women,' but passive and yielding. Again, this is evident in so many attacks where hijabs are torn off. It is the hijab that signals them as weak, oppressed, vulnerable and thus as available victims. In this way, the very vulnerability for which they are degraded is exploited by perpetrators.

Muslim women as terrorists

Identifiable Muslim women are also seen as the threatening other in some contexts; not someone who needs saving, but from whom the nation needs saving. Another paradox arises. While the veil is often taken as a sign of submissiveness, it is also taken as a sign of Islamic aggression. So, if women are not characterized as exotic, or as oppressed, especially when they are veiled, they are represented as mysterious, dangerous and threatening. This, too, is fuelled by the controlling image of 'Muslim-as-terrorist.' Thus, covered women are represented as 'agents' of terrorism or, as in France in recent years, 'as the tools of Islamic organizations aiming to infiltrate France' (Freedman, 2007, p. 170). One right wing politician was quite explicit in his association of the hijab with security threats, claiming that 'there has been so much evidence that we can no longer afford to ignore the real meaning of the headscarf for fundamentalists' (cited in Freedman, 2007, p. 170). Another claimed, in parallel fashion, that wearing a headscarf constituted a 'militant act which is supported by real fundamentalist propaganda' (cited in Freedman, 2007, p. 177). Covering is thus seen as at least tacit support for fundamentalism and terrorism.

Aziz (2012) also draws attention to the popular spectre of the Muslim woman 'warrior' or terrorist. Alongside her male counterpart, the militant female warrior is also ready to wage war on the west. Jiwani (2005, p. 17) describes Canadian media reports showing the Middle Eastern reaction to the 9/11 attacks, with particular attention to women. A *Globe and Mail* journalist wrote of a woman in burqa, who cried out 'America is the head of the snake! America always stands by Israel in its war against us.' Women were described as 'mothers of suicide bombers' whose apparent lack of compassion for the American losses 'was described with resounding condemnation.' These were not 'real' women or mothers like Western women. They were the reproducers of evil and barbarism, active promoters of the most violent forms of Islamic fundamentalism.

So strong is the notion of 'veiling as danger' that there have been moves across the west to ban the hijab, burqa, etc., especially in public schools. In France, one right wing member of Parliament went so far as to call for a total ban on the burqa, arguing that women could use it to conceal a bomb (Posetti, 2007, p. 73). A *Washington Times*

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editorial similarly claimed that granting religious accommodation to Muslim women who wear the headscarf would enable terrorists to use it to elude security measures. Indeed, the title of the editorial is telling in and of itself: *Terrorists Hiding in Hijabs: Muslims Seek Special Treatment to Elude TSA Groping* (Washington Times, 2010). Such sentiments are heightened by pictorial images of veiled and armed women, thereby establishing an equation between the oppression of women, fanaticism and terrorism (Macmaster & Lewis, 1998, p. 128).

That such sentiments are shared by people on the street, and that they are willing to act on them is also apparent in the language that accompanies attacks on Muslim women. One could easily catalogue myriad examples in which perpetrators shouted such phrases as 'she's got a bomb under there.' Consider the following illustrative cases:

> An Arab-American Muslim woman, two months pregnant, who wears the hijab (Muslim headscarf) was walking with her ten-month old baby from a relative's house to her home in Massachusetts when a man and his dog approached them. When the woman asked the man to restrain his dog, he allegedly proceeded to curse at her and verbally harass her, calling her a terrorist. He allegedly continued to yell, followed her, and then pulled off her hijab and beat her until she was unconscious. (ADC, 2008, p. 13)

> On December 24, 2010, a man in Twin Falls, Idaho harassed a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf and with her two children. After asking if she was Muslim, the assailant reportedly told her he spent time in Iraq and 'my friends were killed by you, I was blown up by you.' (Botkins, 2010)

> In Ann Arbor, Michigan, on August 7, 2011, a motorist pulled up to a 21-year-old Palestinian woman while she was stopped at a red light and screamed racial epithets, yelling, 'You're a terrorist,' and, 'Your people need to be killed,' before pointing a handgun at her. (CAIR-MI Asks FBI to Probe Threat Against Muslim Driver, PR NEWSWIRE, August 7, 2011, http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/cair-mi-asks-fbi-to-probe-threat-against-muslim-driver-127096513.html)

The 'war on terror' provides another entrée into an understanding of violence against Muslim women if we consider the lessons from the scholarship on violence against women in the context of war (Ayotte & Husain, 2005). There is an extensive literature that (en)genders the war on terror, thereby bringing to the surface the ways in which gender, and especially intersectionally with other identities, provides the very terrain on which the 'war' has been 'constructed, waged and legitimized' (Hunt & Rygiel, 2006, p. 2). In this context, women's bodies become a medium on which to inscribe hostility and enmity.

The most virulent of bias offenders may very well be waging their own private war against Muslims. In general, Anders Breivik certainly fits in this camp. Akin to Levin and McDevitt's 'mission' offenders, these are the perpetrators who believe they are doing good works for their God or their nation. They are engaged in moral and physical battle against barbarous followers of Islam. Women, in this context, are fair game, and in fact, powerfully appealing as targets. Consider the case of a self-proclaimed white supremacist in Seattle who wielded a knife in the face of a woman and her child. He allegedly walked up to the woman, pointed at her hijab and said, 'you Muslim people scare people when you wear things like that!' (Seattle Times, 2009). Moreover, the Southern Poverty Law Centre has, in recent years, carefully monitored the growth and activity of organized anti-Muslim groups across the US. These groups share a virulent

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hatred of Islam and its followers, as expressed in their rhetoric around such issues as sharia law, terrorism, and the threat of the impending Islamic 'takeover' of the western world.

Impacts of gendered Islamophobia

As with any victim of hate crime, Muslim women's experiences shape their sense of ease and of belonging in their environment. Such violence is intended, in fact, to encourage victims to (re)consider their place, to send the message that they are, in fact, out of place. Thus, they are forced to rethink their visibility. They must consider whether to alter their performance of gender and religion in accordance with what they recognize as the socially established rules for doing so. It is not uncommon, then, for Muslim women to change activities, habits, and ways of being in the world. In this respect, the potential for anti-Muslim violence serves its intended purpose of enforcing appropriate public performances at the very least. It has the additional effect of further isolating members of the Muslim community not only from non-Muslims, but also from one another, perhaps as a means of limiting their collective 'threat' to the current gender, race and religious orders. As Kwan (2008, p. 656) expresses it, 'The totalization of all Muslims as terrorists by the dominant master narrative has not only produced American Muslims as feared/hated subjects but also turned many of them into fearful subjects.'

The oppressive impacts of the threat of Islamophobic violence against Muslim women are wide-ranging, as indicated by the findings of an Australian study.

Women spoke of the detrimental impact racism had on their sense of wellbeing; freedom of movement and sense of safety; sense of belonging and participation in society; and sense of control and agency over their lives. Many participants stated that they experienced a consistent sense of low grade fear and vulnerability (Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria Inc [IWWCV], 2008). Indeed, several studies corroborate the observation that their real and potential victimization has the intended effect of terrorizing and instilling fear among Muslim women – fear of violence, fear of harassment, fear of profiling, and a generalized fear of appearing in public (Abu-Ras & Suarez, 2009; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 2004; Kwan, 2008).

Managing their own safety, then, has become crucial for Muslim women. Sadly, the risk of victimization often means that women are forced to prioritize their safety over their expression of identity and over their independence. Recognizing the visibility represented by the hijab, many women have come to question their choice to be covered (HREOC, 2004; IWWCV, 2008). The following illustrative statements were reported to the HREOC:

> I thought long and hard about taking the scarf off after September 11 like many women … I remember within one hour of going out I had been spat on, had someone threaten me as if they were going to hit me, the shop assistant at Coles would swipe my card and would not look at me in the eye. I remember coming home crying my eyes out and asking myself, 'Do I take this scarf off?'

> People are always going to pick on you for being different. Why should I change for this handful of ignorant people and they will never be happy with me anyway? A lot of girls have taken the scarf off after September 11. It's sad because they [the perpetrators] have won. These handfuls of ignorant people have won and why should we cater for their needs?

> Living in Australia it makes me want to wear the hijab less and I shouldn't have to feel that way.

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Even more extreme, other women opt to remain out of the public eye completely, reluctant to leave the security of their homes (Abu-Ras & Suarez, 2009; HREOC, 2004). As noted in the IWWCV report, 'some Muslim women reported hiding at home with their children for up to a month in the periods immediately following Muslim terrorist attacks overseas.' A participant in the HREOC study reports that 'My experience is if something happens to me on the street, I stay in for one week. I used to always go down to the city as a day out with my kids but a year ago I was physically abused and since then I no longer step out of the house alone, not a train to the city or anything.'

This woman also suggests yet another response to the risk of violence: an unwillingness to appear alone in public. Like many others, she recognizes that there is safety in numbers. For some, this means going only where they know there will be several other Muslims in attendance: 'If I go to the beach I go with a large group of people, and we'll go to a beach that is well known, and is really busy, and there are lot of, I know this might sound racist, but there's a lot of Arabic or Muslim people there. You know at least if there are people there you feel safer' (HREOC, 2004). For others, it means being escorted by family or friends: 'My mother is proud of taking my older brother, who is 23 years old, out with her shopping and stuff. She feels its more protective' (HREOC, 2004). Ironically, violence reproduces the dependency for which Muslim women are so frequently berated. This is a paradox noted by Ahmad (2002, p. 110), who argues that 'in the same moment that we decry the Taliban's cruel restrictions on the mobility of Afghan women, our racial oppression confines women in the United States to their homes as well. We have engaged in our own form of purdah.' In the interests of safety, fearful women forfeit whatever independence they might have attained.

What to do?

The evidence is growing and compelling. Islamophobic violence against women is a reality. Our attention must expand from a singular obsession with private violence against 'oppressed' women by their 'patriarchal' husbands to include public violence perpetrated by others who are motivated by both racism and sexism. The dialogue must occur not only in the public arena but also within the academy. As noted earlier, public violence against Muslim women has not been the focus of our attention. Rather, our energies have been devoted largely to debating whether or how Muslim women are uniquely vulnerable to private violence at the hands of male relatives in particular. It is to be hoped that this paper initiates such a conversation.

It is also crucial, however, that public awareness of Islamophobic violence generally, and gendered Islamophobic violence specifically, be increased. Neither piece of this equation has garnered much public attention. To the extent that it is not in the realm of popular consciousness, the violence thought to be perpetrated *by* Muslims rather than that perpetrated *against* them will continue to occupy centre stage. We might engage here in some 'public criminology' whereby researchers in the field take their findings to the street – via media, public seminars, etc. – rather than confining their discussion to the obscure pages of dusty refereed journals.

If it is to have any impact on the level of violence directed at Muslims and at Muslim women specifically, the emerging dialogue must unpack the misperceptions and stereotypes that are at its roots. There is much work to be done around breaking through the rhetoric to get at the 'realities' of Islam. Nowhere is this more obvious, perhaps, than in the context of public (mis)understanding of Muslim women's decisions to cover/not

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cover. As noted, this is narrowly seen as a symbol of their oppression, rather than as a complex, multiply determined choice. Muslim women's voices must be heard in this respect. Interestingly, at a recent public forum, an hijabi university student indicated her intent to establish a Facebook page devoted to an open dialogue wherein other women who choose to wear hijab or niqab could share their reasons, their rationales for choosing to cover. Such initiatives have tremendous potential to open up honest exchanges between those who live with the threat of Islamophobia and those who might be complicit in supporting that threat.

The directions suggested here presuppose an active research agenda around Islamophobia and violence against Muslim women. Such a programme of research emerged in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but has lost some steam in recent years, especially in North America. We could learn from Australian and UK scholars who continue to highlight the vulnerability of Muslims to religiously and racially motivated violence. Indeed, there are boundless opportunities for comparative research with our colleagues elsewhere. Regardless, research that addresses anti-Muslim violence should attend to the intersectionalities of those forms of violence, to take into account not just gender, but sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, class and other crucial identities that might moderate or exacerbate the risk of violence.

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