

Gendered Islamophobia

Case Study One: Khadija's Story¹

Writer, British Black African, female

As a black British Muslim woman, I face multiple challenges when it comes to my career opportunities and progression. I graduated with a 2:1 in my field and was writing during my time at university to build a portfolio and enhance my employability with different media outlets. I also volunteered regularly and worked as an editor for a publishing company on low pay. However, when I left university I was unable to even get an internship, let alone obtain an entry-level position in my field.

When I compare myself to white friends and colleagues I notice that I need to work twice as hard for what I want to accomplish. Maybe it's my non-English name which means my CV gets overlooked. When I do manage to get through to interviews, the fact that I am an ethnic minority who also wears the hijab makes them less likely to offer me a job.

My family told me that wearing my hijab was holding me back in the job market and that if I wore it differently it would increase my prospects. But this is who I am and in 2017 why should I have to change myself into something that I don't recognise?

There are so many institutional barriers that mean people like me are not given jobs based on our merits and skills. This makes me disillusioned with all of the promises made to me during university and leading up to graduation about what to expect in the world of work. Institutional, systematic racism and Islamophobia are prevalent but I refuse to give up. I continue trying my best to break the barriers that I face and find innovative ways of working in my field to make me stand out.

No-one is asking for favouritism, just that we're given equal opportunity in the job market.

* Khadija's name has been changed to protect her identity

1. What different social identities does Khadija have?
2. Which of these, if any, are linked to systems of oppression?
3. How do these impact Khadija's treatment and opportunities?
4. Which, if any, Islamophobic tropes are connected to Khadija's experiences?
5. How does the content of this case study make you think/feel?

¹ *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All*, Runnymede Trust, 2017, p. 30.

Gendered Islamophobia

Case Study Two: Sahar's Story¹

Molecular geneticist/campaigner, Cardiff, British, Arab, female

I am a Muslim woman of colour who chose to wear the face-veil (niqab) out of conviction of faith. I have been the target of much Islamophobic verbal, and sometimes physical, abuse in the streets, shopping centres and hospitals, so much so that I don't know what life is without it. I have had people call me a 'terrorist', 'bomber' or shouting, 'Go back to your country!' with such vitriol and even grossly swearing at me. It is excruciating to live with.

I once gave an interview with the BBC and someone passed by, looked fearlessly at the camera and shouted 'F[***]ing bomber'. This is what happens in front of the camera: you can imagine [what] could happen behind it.

It was very difficult for me to go to university because of the fear of people and their reaction to me. I considered quitting many times, thinking that the university would be just an additional place of abuse. I used to cry on my way to university, and if I had not had my supportive father who pushed me to face my fears courageously, I think I would have returned home at the steps of my university building. During my time in university, I never faced discrimination from the staff or lecturers. In fact, my personal tutor went to great lengths to support me, well above and beyond his job description.

However, soon after graduation the struggle of finding a job began. At the beginning, I was not shortlisted for any job I applied for, so I took my CV to one of my supervisors asking for it to be reviewed. The first thing she said: 'Sahar, your CV is good and your work with the Muslim community illustrates excellent leadership, organization and communication skills. But it's too "Islamic", and in the current hostile environment concerning Muslims, you cannot get anywhere with it.' I reluctantly changed my CV, and was immediately shortlisted and offered an interview.

Many Islamophobes accuse me and others of raising the victim card, belittling my struggles, blaming my choice as a polarizing tool. I want to say to these Islamophobes, yes I am a victim of your hate and bigotry, that is not a card I am raising and I don't have the victim mentality.

As a result of my experiences I decided to take a career break for one year to campaign against Islamophobia full-time. I just don't want anyone to go through what I've been through.

I want to see Muslim women confident within their identities, unapologetic about their choices, successful in every aspect of their lives, contributing to society and participating in public life. I will not spare any time or effort in achieving that.

1. What different social identities does Sahar have?
2. Which of these are linked to systems of oppression?
3. How do these impact Sahar's treatment and opportunities?
4. Which, if any, Islamophobic tropes are connected to Sahar's experiences?
5. How does the content of this case study make you think/feel?

¹ *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All*, Runnymede Trust, 2017, p. 40.

Gendered Islamophobia

Case Study Three: Layla's Story¹

Nurse, 23, London, British Arab, female

I'm a born and bred East Londoner and despite London's multiculturalism, the amount of Islamophobia I experience is astonishing. I work in healthcare because I want to help people and make them better but in my job I regularly face Islamophobia and racism, particularly after the terrorist attacks across Europe in 2016 and 2017.

For example, I had a middle-aged man who had various medical issues and he refused to acknowledge me as his nurse from his first night. When I asked why he told me to 'f[***] off back to your P[*]ki country'. When I explained I'm not Asian and I'm only here to help him he got increasingly abusive, calling me a 'Terrorist b[*]tch', [...] asking me whether I was having intercourse with Osama Bin Laden and taunting me throughout the night about me wearing the hijab. He refused to take any of the medication I had given him and said that he would 'rather die than be nursed by a terrorist'.

When I asked to be allocated a different patient my manager told me that it was unprofessional of me to make such a request. This should have made me upset but sadly it didn't because I've also experienced Islamophobia and racism from a young age which has made it a normality within my everyday life. My classmates in secondary school mocked the hijab, the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. After the 2017 terrorist attacks in London, I've seen more and more of my own friends from university, colleagues that I work with and train with, express their contempt for Muslims on various social media.

Many Muslims will tell you that they don't pay much attention to the Islamophobic comments from strangers because of their ignorance, but you can't play down comments from your own colleagues and friends who've know[n] you for years. My family and some of my friends give me a lot of support but even though they're no strangers to racism they can't understand what I am going through. Offloading to them is not enough. Healthcare professional[s] are bound by law to treat people in a non-judgmental manner even if patients are being abusive. But what about us?

* Layla's name has been changed to protect her identity

1. What different social identities does Layla have?
2. Which of these are linked to systems of oppression?
3. How do these impact Layla's treatment and opportunities?
4. Which, if any, Islamophobic tropes are connected to Layla's experiences?
5. How does the content of this case study make you think/feel?

¹ *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All*, Runnymede Trust, 2017, p. 36.