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Biographies and Research Context for Evidence Submission

I am [Dr Özge Onay](#), a University Teacher in Criminology, Sociology, and Social Policy at Loughborough University. My research specialises in Islamophobia and the intersection of race, religion, and class. I have explored how British Muslim Turks navigate Islamophobia from seemingly contradictory directions and examined the structural and ideological forces shaping exclusion and discrimination. My work contributes to broader discussions on racial, ethnic and religious justice. This submission provides evidence and recommendations relevant to the inquiry on Gendered Islamophobia, highlighting the specific ways in which Muslim women experience intersecting forms of discrimination.

Summary

With a strong foundation in research on race, religion, and cultural identity and belonging politics of Turkish Muslims in Global North, my work inter *alia* highlights how Muslim women are often unfairly viewed as symbols of oppression or extremism rather than individuals exercising personal choice in the UK context. In Britain's post-9/11 and post-Brexit landscape, these women frequently face discrimination in workplaces, education, and public spaces due to deep-rooted misconceptions. First-hand accounts from my research illustrate how such biases impact their daily lives, from lost job opportunities to social exclusion. These experiences are not isolated but reflect broader structural inequalities that reinforce stereotypes and hinder inclusion. My rationale for submitting evidence to this inquiry is to ensure that these lived realities are acknowledged in policymaking. Addressing this requires a shift in public and policy discussions—moving beyond outdated Orientalist narratives to challenge discrimination, promote understanding, and ensure that Muslim women are seen, heard, and treated as equal members of society.

Response to Set Questions

My submission focuses on questions 1, 2, 6.

1. Why are women more likely to be the victim of Islamophobia and what common forms does it take?

There is no specific law prohibiting Islamophobia (Tyler-Todd et al., 2023, p. 5). While some aspects of gendered Islamophobia are covered (Hopkin, 2023, p. 2), there are many and variegated risks Muslim women and girls face that existing regulations do not fully address. More legislation and guidance are required because daily forms of Islamophobia are differentiated and context-bound and therefore identified across the spectrums dependent on histories, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds of Muslim communities in the UK.

Ongoing initiatives such as *Islamophobia Awareness Month* (IAM), a not-for-profit organisation founded in 2012 by a coalition of organisations, aim to raise awareness of Islamophobia. IAM was

launched through an event at the London Muslim Centre in November 2012. However, it is evident that the diverse identities within Muslim communities—including sectarian, 'racial', cultural, and ethnic differences—are not always visible within existing evaluation frameworks. These omissions undermine an understanding of the differentiated and distinct challenges faced by British Muslim women.

Furthermore, the existing hate crime framework does not fully account for the layered and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by British Muslim women. The *Law Com No. 402: Hate Crime Laws – Final Report (2021)* acknowledges that current legislation does not adequately address intersectional hate crime, particularly in cases where gender and religion intersect. Tell MAMA has documented how visibly Muslim women are disproportionately targeted for Islamophobic hate crimes, often experiencing both racial and gendered abuse (Law Commission, 2021, p. 139). However, factors such as race, gender, familial background, class and religious identity interact in ways that create distinct vulnerabilities, which are often overlooked in policy responses. Hence, a more context-specific and nuanced understanding of the experiences of British Muslim women, rather than one monolithically limited to 'dress,' including the 'hijab,' is necessary.

Muslim women are disproportionately targeted by Islamophobic discrimination and violence in Britain, largely due to the visibility of religious attire such as the hijab, niqab, or burqa. This gendered dimension of Islamophobia is deeply embedded in colonial, Orientalist, and security-driven discourses, which frame Muslim women as either oppressed subjects in need of rescue or as symbols of extremism and national threat. The post-9/11 securitization of Islam has further intensified these narratives, making Muslim women increasingly vulnerable to social exclusion, workplace discrimination, and physical and verbal abuse. Islamophobia against women in Britain is not a recent phenomenon but is tied to longstanding colonial and Orientalist narratives. As Frantz Fanon (2004) observed in 'Algeria Unveiled,' European colonizers saw the headscarf as a symbol of resistance to Western modernity. This colonial perception persists today in the British context, where veiled Muslim women are viewed as embodying both defiance against Western values and a perceived security risk (Yegenoglu, 2012).

This framing results in two dominant yet contradictory stereotypes: Muslim women are seen as either passive victims of male oppression or as agents of radicalisation and extremism. These stereotypes directly impact the everyday lives of veiled Muslim women, limiting their access to employment, education, and public spaces.

Empirical Evidence from Muslim Women's Experiences

The testimony of Shaz, a veiled Muslim driving instructor, illustrates how Islamophobic bias manifests in professional settings. She described how a student's mother withdrew from lessons, likely due to her visible religious identity. This experience reflects broader patterns where veiled Muslim women encounter exclusion and suspicion, reinforcing the perception that they are unfit for professional roles (Awan & Zempi, 2019).

Similarly, Gülkız, a local council worker, highlighted how media portrayals contribute to public misconceptions about veiled Muslim women, leading to prejudiced interactions. She noted that wearing a hijab often elicited assumptions of oppression, illustrating the persistence of colonial "rescue narratives" (Yegenoglu, 1998). These narratives sustain the belief that Muslim women need liberation from Islamic traditions, often justifying policies and societal attitudes that marginalise them.

Merve, who does not wear a hijab, a Turkish Muslim interpreter, shared how her colleagues expressed surprise that a Turkish woman could work independently and that her husband supported

her career. This reaction underpins how Islamophobia intersects with racialised stereotypes of Turkishness, reinforcing perceptions of Muslim men as patriarchal and authoritarian while portraying Muslim women as submissive and economically dependent (Garner & Selod, 2015).

The Common Forms of Islamophobia Faced by Women

Verbal and Physical Abuse: Muslim women are disproportionately targeted in hate crimes, facing public harassment, slurs, and even violence, especially when wearing Islamic attire (Allen, 2016).

Workplace Discrimination: Muslim women report difficulty securing employment and experience bias from colleagues and employers who view their veiling as incompatible with professional settings.

Social Exclusion: Encounters such as Shaz's indicate how veiled Muslim women face avoidance and hostility in everyday interactions, reinforcing social marginalization.

Policy Recommendations:

- Strengthen legal protections against Islamophobic hate crimes, ensuring specific safeguards for veiled Muslim women who are disproportionately targeted in public spaces.
- Reform employment and workplace discrimination policies to prevent bias against Muslim women, particularly those wearing visible religious attire.
- Challenge media representations that reinforce Orientalist and securitised narratives concerning, though not limited to, veiled Muslim women, promoting diverse and accurate and intersectional portrayals.
- Revise counter-terrorism policies such as Prevent strand of government's overarching counter-terrorism strategy, to eliminate disproportionate surveillance of Muslim communities and remove the securitisation of Muslim women's identities.
- Introduce educational reforms that integrate Islamophobia awareness into school curricula, equipping educators with the tools to address discrimination and harassment effectively.
- Support community-led initiatives by increasing funding for grassroots Muslim women's organizations that provide social, legal, and psychological support.

2. What can schools, sports clubs and other community groups, trade unions, places of worship and workplaces do to help tackle Islamophobia and to support Muslim women and girls?

Tackling Islamophobia and supporting Muslim women and girls requires moving beyond simplistic assumptions about Muslim identity and ensuring that policies and initiatives reflect the diversity of Muslim experiences. While discussions on Islamophobia in workplaces, schools, sports clubs, and community spaces often focus on the visibility of hijabi women, it is critical to recognise that not all Muslim women wear the hijab. Turkish Muslims, for instance, provide a clear example of how religious identity does not always align with external markers such as dress. This diversity must be reflected in the way institutions shape their anti-Islamophobia strategies, ensuring that support mechanisms do not inadvertently reinforce stereotypes about what it means to be a Muslim woman.

Structural changes within workplaces and educational settings must address Islamophobia in a way that goes beyond symbolic accommodations. Providing prayer spaces and wudu facilities is important, but policies should also recognise the wider challenges that Muslim women face, including biases related to career progression, assumptions about religiosity, and exclusion from

leadership roles. Workplaces that have implemented inclusive policies—such as Ramadan guidelines and flexible working hours—offer a model for broader institutional change. These initiatives must be expanded to include training that challenges assumptions about Muslim women’s professional ambitions, family structures, and personal choices, ensuring that support is not contingent on a singular image of Muslim identity.

Education is key to dismantling Islamophobic narratives, and it must be integrated at multiple levels within schools, trade unions, and community organisations. Anti-Islamophobia training should not only address overt discrimination but also microaggressions and the ways in which Muslim women—hijabi or not—are subject to exclusionary practices. Schools must go beyond tokenistic representations of Islam in curricula and ensure that Muslim girls, regardless of their dress, are included in discussions on gender equality, leadership, and representation. Trade unions and professional networks must also advocate for policies that protect all Muslim women, recognising that workplace discrimination often operates along multiple axes, including ethnicity, class, parental homeland, stereotypical archetypes associated with distinctive attributes of Muslim communities, migration status.

Ramadan is fast approaching, so interfaith initiatives provide an opportunity to engage with the diversity of Muslim experiences and challenge monolithic portrayals of Islam. The success of interfaith *iftars* in workplaces demonstrates the potential for shared experiences to foster greater understanding, but these dialogues must extend beyond religious fasting to address broader issues of representation, equity, and systemic barriers. Encouraging participation from Muslim women across different backgrounds—those who wear hijab and those who do not—ensures that the conversation remains inclusive and does not reinforce narrow narratives of what it means to be visibly Muslim. Many Muslim women balance professional responsibilities with increased domestic and religious duties during the month of Ramadan, making flexible working arrangements especially critical. Employers should consider accommodations such as adjusted schedules, remote work options, and rest breaks to ensure that Muslim women can observe fasting without compromising their well-being or career progression.

Policy-driven action is essential to making these changes sustainable. Schools and workplaces must establish clear mechanisms for reporting Islamophobia, ensuring that discrimination is addressed regardless of whether a Muslim woman wears hijab. Trade unions must advocate for stronger protections against religious and racial discrimination in hiring, career progression, and leadership opportunities. By embedding these structural changes within institutions, organisations can create environments that support all Muslim women, not just those who fit into mainstream or expected representations of Islamic identity

3. In what ways does gendered Islamophobia have an intersectional dimension? Are some women more likely than others to be subject to this abuse and prejudice and if so, why?

My research evidence demonstrates that the experiences of Turkish Muslim women in the UK provide rich insight into the intersectional nature of gendered Islamophobia, revealing how their racialisation and gendered identities overlap in distinct ways. These intersections lead to different forms of abuse and prejudice, with the lived experiences of Merve, Ayşe, and Azra exemplifying the complex layers of discrimination based on Islamophobia, Turkishness, gender, and accent. The

following exploration of these women's narratives highlights how gendered Islamophobia manifests in intersectional ways:

Accents as Markers of Difference: Derin's experience highlights how accent plays a crucial role in the racialisation of Turkish people, with linguistic differences becoming a significant site of exclusion. Derin explains how first-generation Turkish immigrants are easily identifiable by their "foreign accent," which immediately questions their belonging in British society: "They [Turks] just feel put off... when they go somewhere, a native white English realises straight away that they are not born here, hearing their accents." This aligns with Frantz Fanon's theory on language, where an "imperfect" or non-native language marks individuals as outsiders, regardless of citizenship or years of residence. The combination of Turkishness and a foreign accent results in exclusion, reinforcing a racial hierarchy that disregards their belonging in the UK.

Spatial Dimensions of Islamophobia: Ayşe's narrative provides a spatial context to the intersection of Islamophobia and Turkishness, particularly outside London. She notes that her Islamic veil, coupled with her Turkish identity, makes her visibly different, leading to exclusionary experiences: "If I travel outside of London, especially different areas, certain areas, then they can give you a strange look because they know you are a stranger, an outsider, you are a foreigner." Ayşe reflects on how the territorial boundaries of public space are patrolled by dominant groups, particularly in areas where whiteness is normative. In these predominantly white spaces, her presence is questioned or deemed unwelcome based on her physical markers of difference. This aligns with Yegenoglu's (2003) concept of conditional hospitality, where individuals like Ayşe may be "tolerated" but are never fully accepted, their presence subject to the whims of white sovereignty.

Microaggressions and Assumptions of Incompetence: Azra's experience in a classroom setting further demonstrates how Islamophobia intersects with ethnic stereotypes. When her teacher highlights the linguistic errors of a fellow Turkish student and then makes remarks about Azra's Turkish identity, it reinforces the stereotype of linguistic incompetence associated with Turkishness: "The remarks of the Business teacher when Azra's Turkish friend did not use the 'correct English' implies that if one is Turkish, incompetency in English language use is to be only what is expected." This assumption, rooted in Azra's Turkish identity, illustrates how racial microaggressions manifest, particularly in educational contexts. Azra's discomfort is further dismissed by the teacher, revealing a broader issue of racialised academic expectations that unfairly position Turkish students as inferior. The teacher's lack of awareness of the harm caused by such remarks highlights the deep-seated prejudice against Turkish students in academic environments.

Gendered Islamophobia in Intersectional Dimensions: The narratives of Derin, Ayşe, and Azra show that gendered Islamophobia operates in an intersectional manner, where the unique experiences of Turkish Muslim women are shaped by the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and religion. While Muslim men may be stereotyped based on their religious identity (e.g., the beard), Muslim women—not always those who wear the veil—are subjected to gendered forms of abuse that involve sexualised and patriarchal scrutiny. This intersectional dynamic highlights how Turkishness and Islamophobia are experienced differently by women, particularly due to the visibility and politicisation of their bodies in public spaces.

These stories also demonstrate how gendered Islamophobia varies depending on the visibility of Muslimness (such as the veil) and Turkishness (such as accent or name). For example, women like Ayşe and Azra experience distinct forms of prejudice when their physical markers—such as the veil or accent—are more visible than those of their male counterparts. Turkish Muslim women are often viewed through a dual lens of ethnic and religious identity, subjecting them to multiple layers of

marginalisation. Their experiences suggest that Islamophobia is not a monolithic phenomenon but one that is shaped by the intersection of race, gender, language, and spatial belonging. Some women, especially those who visibly express both their Muslim identity and Turkish ethnicity, are more likely to experience these compounded forms of prejudice and abuse, highlighting the complexities of belonging in a racially and culturally divided society.

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