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'All of a Sudden, There Are Muslims': Visibilities and Islamophobic Violence in Canada

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Abstract

This paper traces the meanings and impacts of the increased and transformed visibility of Muslim communities in Canada, as evidenced through their experiences of surveillance and violence. It explores the contours of this visibility as well as the consequences. Relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims are shaped in and through hostility, harassment and violence which is directed toward increasingly visible Muslim communities. Guiding the analysis of the connections between visibility and hate crime is a frame that draws upon Brighenti's ideal types of visibility: media-type, control-type and social-type.

Keywords

Hate crime; Islamophobia; visibility.

Introduction

Just 10 days after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, then-President of the Canadian Arab Foundation (CAF), John Asfour, observed in a *Globe and Mail* interview that 'There is the Canada before the 11th of September and now as I see it, there is the Canada after the 11th of September' (cited in Kilgour, Millar and O'Neill 2002: 156). The Canada 'after September 11' is one in which Muslims are caught anew in the sights of media, policy makers, security forces and the broader public. Prior to 9/11, Canadian Muslims remained largely unremarked. They were not recognized as a noteworthy presence in quantitative or qualitative terms. Indeed, as Cainkar (2002: 22) observes, they have often been elided with Arabs generally, and thus 'hidden under the Caucasian label, if not forgotten altogether'. The tragic events of 11 September 2001 changed that dramatically. Now Muslims are highly visible, regularly (re)marked. As the title – drawn from a project participant – suggests, 'All of a sudden, there are Muslims' (Male). Now they are regularly and inexorably under the public gaze, every action and utterance, it seems, subject to close scrutiny.

At the heart of this paper is an attempt to trace the meanings and impacts of the increased and transformed visibility of Muslims in Canada, as evidenced by the experiences of participants in my recent study in Ontario, Canada. I am interested in exploring the contours of this visibility – how Muslims have been rendered visible – as well as the consequences – how non-Muslims

have responded. As Brighenti (2007: 325) poses it: 'when something becomes more visible or less visible than before, we should ask ourselves who is acting on and reacting to the properties of the field and which specific relationships are being shaped'. I am concerned with how these relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims are shaped in and through hostility, harassment and violence directed toward increasingly visible Muslim communities. Guiding the analysis of the connections between visibility and hate crime is a framework developed by Brighenti (2007) that posits three distinct yet inter-connected forms of visibility. Each has consequences for shaping Muslim vulnerability to hate crime in either enabling or disabling ways.

The paper draws on findings from a series of interviews and focus groups with Muslim men, women and youth in Ottawa and Toronto, Canada. In each city, we conducted eight in-depth, semi-structured interviews with members of local Muslim organizations. Three focus groups were also held in each of the cities as well. We held separate focus groups for youth and women, as well as one open mixed group. The interviews and focus groups probed for insights into the contexts, experiences and especially the impacts of racial violence. I was interested in exploring what meanings these events have for the people involved and for their communities. That is, how fearful of bias-motivated victimization are Canadian Muslims? What impact does it have on their sense of belonging in Canada? I also highlighted the respondents' suggestions for policy initiatives or intervention programs that might ameliorate the damage to community harmony and mitigate future occurrences.

The participants ranged in age from 16 to 76 years of age; 40 were female, 32 were male. Culturally, they were a diverse lot, ranging from native born Canadians to people who had lived in the country for only a few years or even a few months. Multiple nations of origin were represented, including India, Pakistan, Somalia, Turkey, Albania, the UK and France. Some were Imams, some were educators, some were health professionals, some were unemployed. Many were underemployed, having trained as professionals elsewhere but working below their skill levels in Canada.

Muslims comprise a rapidly growing proportion of the population in Canada. From 1.9 per cent (nearly 600,000) in 2001, the Muslim population had grown to 2.7 per cent (nearly 900,000) by 2006 (Malenfant, Lebel and Martel 2010). Growth projections suggest no slowing of this pace. By 2017, they may represent over 4 per cent (1.4 million) (Belanger and Malenfant 2005) and, by 2031, Muslims could very well represent over 6 per cent (2.5 million) of Canadians (Malenfant et al. 2010). Approximately 85 per cent of Canadian Muslims live in major metropolitan areas, with nearly 400,000 in the Greater Toronto region, over 150,000 in Montreal, and nearly 60,000 in Ottawa (Malenfant et al. 2010). Roughly one third of Canadian Muslims are of South Asian background; a third of Arab background; and a third of other backgrounds, including African and European. For some Canadians, the growth and diversity, along with the increasing visibility of these communities, appears to be cause for concern. Consequently, negative representations of Muslims are widespread in public discourse and the media. This is paralleled by popular opinion that is shaped by those images, as well as security practices that are similarly grounded in the association of Islam with criminality and terrorism.

In what follows, I trace the connection between visibility, vilification and violence in the context of Canadian Muslims' experiences. I begin by laying out Brighenti's understanding of visibilities. This provides the theoretical lens through which I then examine the construction and implications of Muslims' visibility with respect to surveillance and control at the hands of state agents and private citizens alike. I close with a discussion of the flip side of visibility: that is, the ways in which their conspicuousness is used by Muslims to empower rather than disempower themselves individually and collectively.

Visibilities

The analysis offered here is a natural extension of my earlier work in the field of hate crime. Throughout, I have consistently characterized hate crime as a mechanism of power:

> ... intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterize a given social order ... It is a means of marking both the Self and the Other in such a way as to re-establish their 'proper' relative positions, as given and reproduced by broader ideologies and patterns of social and political inequality. (Perry 2001: 10)

Moreover, I went on to characterize power as a cornerstone of the politics of difference, in that it is embedded in the struggle to set the terms of discourse and action, and to impose a particular type of order.

However, each form of power contains its own corresponding forms of resistance. Those relations of inequality must consistently be reproduced in the midst of struggle and contestation. Moreover, power operates not just at the level of state but across society in everyday micropractices or in 'politics of everyday life' (Fraser 1981: 272). While it is perhaps most obvious in the operations of schools or prisons or policing, power also circulates among people on the street. Civilians negotiate their place through myriad interactions and assertions of identity.

Like power, visibility is neither inherently empowering nor disempowering. On the one hand, both sides of the equation may empower subjects. To be *in*visible is to fly under the radar, so to speak, in ways that allow groups to exist unremarked and thus secure. Yet visibility – as recognition – allows groups to engage with the broader public. On the other hand, the 'economy of visibility' can also herald negative effects. *In*visibility can render its subjects impotent, where it implies marginalization. Visibility at once parallels and permits the 'normalizing gaze' by which a particular ordering is created. It 'can be used to divide marked and unmarked persons' (Brighenti 2007: 334). It allows both self and other to be seen, but especially to be seen in relation to one another. What is most significant about this positioning of self and other is the fact that it implies the normativity of a hegemonic form, what Lorde (1995: 192) refers to as a 'mythical norm', which is 'usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society'. Moreover, that which is considered normal 'is unmarked, unnoticed, unthematized, untheorized' (Brighenti 2007: 26).

The marking of difference as deficiency is a social, political process that has the effect of creating hierarchies along divisions such as race, sexuality and class. Individuals and collectives are assessed for 'fit' or belonging relative to the norm. Once a group has been deemed abnormal, it is necessarily assigned a subordinate place in society. The implication for Muslims, in particular is that 'it excludes them from belonging ... by reinforcing a construction of them as a "potential terrorist" and dangerous Other that is constructed in opposition to "white" ... subjectivity' (Finn 2011: 414). Through an array of dividing practices, the threatening Muslim is sorted from the normative Canadian, the enemy from the patriot, in such a way to render Muslims visible and thus 'remarkable'.

Yet recall the notion that the functioning of visibility is not fixed; it is protean and adaptive. Highlighting this diversity, Brighenti identifies three ideal types of visibility, which provide useful heuristic devices for the analysis that follows here. There is what she refers to as the 'media-type' which forcefully renders subjects 'supra-visible' in ways that distort their identities (Brighenti 2007: 330). Through myriad discursive processes, communities are brought to the fore of public consciousness, often in ways that distinguish them as the feared Other. To be 'supra-visible' or 'super-visible' is to be seen through a lens that often warps the representation

of identities. In line with this conception, I examine the emergence of the popular image of 'the Muslim' in the aftermath of September 11 attacks. Their corporal and discursive presence has provided massive fodder for political and media portrayals.

Once marked in this way, communities become subject to the 'control-type' of visibility as a resource for 'regulation or selectivity and stratification, or both' (Brighenti 2007: 339). In this case, visibility becomes the basis for dividing practices as well as for controlling forms of violence. On the one hand, the popular representations of communities are shored up by parallel practices that draw further attention to Muslims. State security actions, for example, both draw on and reinforce popular images, institutionalizing them within classification schema. This enables and legitimates subsequent subjugation and control with respect to stigmatized groups. On the other hand, once classified by the state, such groups are 'revealed' as threatening, thereby (re)shaping popular reactions, both attitudinal and behavioural. Indeed, Muslims are the focus of heightened visibility in the interests of containment via both state surveillance and street level hate crime.

Finally, visibility is also a potentially empowering resource: social-type, as Brighenti (2007: 339) refers to it. In this model, visibility is akin to recognition. It revolves around groups' and individuals' claims to be 'seen' and acknowledged. Indeed, subjects of 'the gaze' can shape whether and how they are seen (Brighenti 2007: 332). They can actively exploit their visibility in political ways so that it becomes the foundation of self-conscious action and for affirmative recognition. This has been very much part of the Muslim response to their misrepresentation.

Constructing visibility: Muslims after 9/11

As noted above, the Other must be made visible before they can be justifiably set outside the parameters of normalcy. Post-9/11, Muslims have in fact become supra-visible and subject to excessive scrutiny, such that 'everything you do becomes gigantic to the point that it paralyses you' (Brighenti 2007: 330). A key means by which Muslims have been rendered so very visible has been through political and media (mis)representations. In fact, Arabs generally and Muslims specifically may represent the last 'legitimate' subjects of slanderous imagery and stereotypes (Said 1997; Suleiman1999). Political leaders, unfortunately, play a significant role in this, as Muslims can attest: 'I think it's just politicians using terrorism as a tool ... It's really putting it out there and making it become a really important part of people's consciousness' (Female). We are by now all familiar with George W Bush's frequent references to 'evil doers' – by which he singled out Muslims – in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. More recently, Canadian Muslims have been vilified by Stephen Harper's statement that 'Islamicism' is the greatest threat to the West. This did not go unnoticed by participants like the following, who commented on this sort of fear-mongering:

> He set a tone because, if the prime minister of Canada, one of the most tolerable [sic] and peaceful nations, is making a statement like that, it just applies the stereotypes, the hatred, the ignorance in people. And it just, it just makes the situation worse ... That was a very dangerous statement. (Female)

As this statement implies, state rhetoric, practice and policy can provide the formal framework within which popular imagery and hostility emerge. Political discourse reaffirms and legitimates the negative evaluations of difference that give rise to hostility, even hate crime. Muslims in Canada, especially post-9/11, have been subject to the stigmatizing effects of state action intended to control and contain the terrorist threat by which all Muslims become suspect. Since the attacks, political and public figures have intensified their 'crusade' against Muslims.

Popular mythologies of Islam are also recreated through the media. Muslims are cast as 'islamic, islamic, fundamentalism, murderer, terrorist, terrorist, terrorist. They repeat ten times

a day every day and it has, I think it has an impact on other people' (Male). In a 2002 nationwide survey of some 300 Canadian Muslims, the Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-CAN) (2004) found that 55 per cent of respondents thought the Canadian media were more biased since 9/11. A survey of nine Canadian newspapers by the Canadian Islamic Congress (2005) noted an increase in anti-Muslim stereotypes after September 2001. More recently, Navigator Research (2012: pers. comm. 12 October.) found that, across Canadian mainstream media, 59 per cent of news articles featuring Muslims was negative in tone (see also Helly 2004, 2011).

Indeed, Muslims in my study were very clear about how deeply implicated the media are in constructing threatening images of Muslims. Consider the following example:

> There are all sorts of stories spread out, that Muslims aren't normal, that there's something really different about these people. It's just the idea that they are not normal, that they can't fit in the West for some inherent division between them and the Western world, that they are inherently violent against women. That plays a lot of factors into the idea that they are sort of barbaric, just this idea that we are not civilized and not rational, just not violent the way a white person would be violent or a Christian person would be violent. (Female)

The representations to which the participants refer help to distance white from not white. The latter is to be feared, ridiculed and loathed for their differences as recognized in the popular psyche. Significantly, these legitimating ideologies and images mark the Other, and the boundaries between self and other. A young Muslim man points to the ways in which this process of othering is evident: 'one of the talk shows at least once a week picks on some incident in Muslim community here or abroad in anywhere in the world, and uses that to [say] "Yes, Muslims are the bad immigrants or bad people, they are not Canadian"' (Male). Such negative constructions of Islam undoubtedly underlie the widespread mistreatment and victimization of Muslims.

Rendering visibility: Surveillance of the 'dangerous' other

Few activities so dramatically promote Muslims' visibility as the post-9/11 surveillance practices of Western states. Such practices have both actively enhanced the visibility of Muslims and situated them as 'not like us'. Contemporary 'security' measures call attention to the Muslim presence and the inherent threat posed by their presumed traits, as outlined above. In short, excessive surveillance reinforces the normality of whiteness/Christianity, while 'abnormalizing' non-white Muslims. Their surveillance as potential terrorists places them in a position of marginalization *vis-à-vis* white Canadians, who exercise power over 'brown' bodies thus marking them as Other (Finn 2011: 424). A Muslim woman speaks of this in the context of airport checks, stating that, because of such practices, 'I think we feel even further more ostracized'.

One of the consequences of the demonization of Muslims on the part of politicians (noted above) is that it finds its way into policies and practices that further stigmatize the group. This is especially the case with respect to the activities of law enforcement and security agencies. Anyone who displays an interest in Middle Eastern affairs or who is noticeably devout in their religion is vulnerable to scrutiny by federal agencies in particular. Participants recognized this risk and its impact:

> ... some practicing Muslims are really afraid of large Muslim groups and seeing that you might be being followed by CSIS. My mom was really stringent on me saying, 'Stay away from the MSA. I know they're very good people, they do great things but you could be put in danger'. (Male)

Here, Muslim identity is taken to signify terrorist identity, such that Muslims are marked as different from and indeed threatening to 'good' Canadians.

Particularly in the context of politically charged events like terrorist attacks, government agencies step up their engagement with Muslims (Bahdi 2003; Helly 2004, 2011). This has been readily apparent in Canada, for example, since the September 11 attacks. Fast on the heels of the attacks, Canada joined the US and UK in an ill-considered flurry of legislative activity intended to strengthen anti-terrorism legislation. These revisions allow for an unprecedented extension of intrusive law enforcement activities on the one hand, and contraction of individual and collective rights on the other. A 2005 CAIR-CAN report documents extensive experiences in which law enforcement agents (Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS), Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), police) 'approached' or 'contacted' Arabs and Muslims, often with no explanation for the contact. Of the 467 respondents, 8 per cent had been contacted – the bulk of whom (84 per cent) were Canadian citizens. Among those who were not directly contacted, nearly half (43 per cent) knew at least one other Canadian Muslim who had been (CAIR-CAN 2005). Moreover, 19 per cent of those who had been contacted indicated that this was not a single event, but characterized by multiple contacts.

Participants in my study also shared tales of hyper-surveillance, where they or someone close to them were subject to scrutiny in their personal and public lives. Such incidents took place in their homes, in their workplaces and in border zones, and served to mark them as racialized Muslims and thus 'suspect'. Consider the following illustrative example:

> My father had a CSIS interview because he's an Imam in Kanata, so they thought he's a big authority figure. So they were thinking Oh he's telling you whatever. I mean, they sat him down. He went through an interview. Our phones were being tapped, I know that for sure. And it was frightening ... And then when the CSIS people called him for an interview and everything, it was, like, so frightening; not only for me, for my mother. It was the worst feeling because it was like 'Where's the trust?' Just because he has a beard? (Female)

The effect of these patterns is to draw a line between 'law abiding' Canadians and 'terrorist' Muslims. It reinforces the public perception that Muslims *are* questionable with respect to their loyalty to Canada and with respect to their knowledge of, if not involvement in, terrorism. However unfounded the police attention may be, it nonetheless leaves a lingering sense of doubt. The pattern of state badgering of Muslims:

> ... makes people feel comfortable with their prejudices and grants those who hold pre-existing racist attitudes permission to express those attitudes and expect them to be taken seriously. It empowers individual prejudices and fuels popular fears. (Bahdi 2003: 314)

Punishing visibility: Hate crime

The rhetoric of hate does not fall on deaf ears. The most recent survey results available (Geddes 2013) underscore the persistence of widespread antipathy toward Muslims, finding that 54 per cent of Canadians held an unfavourable view of Islam, up sharply from 46 per cent 2009. To put this in perspective, 39 per cent held an unfavourable opinion of Sikhism; all of the other religions were regarded unfavourably by less than 30 per cent of Canadians. A 2006 Environics poll sheds some light on the connection between the negative representations described above and public opinion. It found that Canadians who believe that a growing sense of Islamic identity in Canada is bad for the country most often cite perceived poor treatment of women and girls (36%) in Islam as their main worry. An additional three in ten (30%) say that the possibility of

violence perpetrated by Muslims is their main worry (see also Navigator Research 2012: pers. comm. 12 October).

Ultimately, these sentiments are also precursors to hate-motivated violence. One participant in my study stated that 'the media's created an enemy and they're attacking the enemy because that's what they've been told to do by the media' (Female). Thus, it is not only the gaze of the state that constrains. Public scrutiny and reaction also seek to limit the inclusion of Muslims into the broader community. Indeed, the consequences of visibility and its attendant division of us and them are obvious in the context of hate crime. Corresponding to the enhanced corporal and discursive visibility of Muslims has been a sharp increase in violence and harassment directed toward those deemed to be from that 'feared' community (Poynting and Perry 2007).

That Muslims are over-represented as victims of hate crime is suggested by the finding that, in 2011, Muslims represented about 15 per cent of all victims of hate crime motivated by religion. Added to this is the fact that more than 25 per cent of racially motivated hate crimes were perpetrated against East/South East Asians, South Asians and Arab/West Asians, ethno-racial groups typically perceived by the general population as likely to be Muslim (Allen and Boyce 2013). From being virtually absent before 2001, hate crimes against Muslims rose dramatically in the months after September 2001 (Helly 2004, 2011). In Montréal, for example, the police recorded about a dozen complaints from 11 September to 20 September 2001. The Council on American Islamic Relations (Hussain 2002) recorded approximately fifty incidents in Canada between 11 September and 15 November 2001, including death threats, and assaults (Nimer 2001). Municipal police departments in Canada also reported an upsurge of (racist) hate crimes, almost all of which were related to the September 2001 attacks (Helly 20011).

Violence and intimidation are devices available to counter a perceived 'threat' and thus remind Muslims of 'their place' in the cultural hierarchy. Interestingly, few of the participants had experienced serious violence, although most had been targets of verbal abuse. Moreover, virtually everyone had multiple stories to share about incidents that they had witnessed or of which they were otherwise aware. Among the physical assaults were incidents like the following:

> I was choked and physically assaulted, plus threatened because I said, declared I was Muslim and would not change my religion. (Male)

> I was walking through my neighbourhood with my Muslim friends when someone threw a bottle of urine at us from a car window and drove away, laughing and calling us terrorists. (Female)

Additionally, as signs of Islam, Muslim centres of worship, and community centres are also frequent targets:

> I know obviously, like, hate crimes that have been directed – not towards me but towards the mosque, 'cause the mosque in my city had fire, like, bombing attempts, like, twice. Not bombing attempts. Arson attempts twice. (Female)

Visibility emerges where Islam transgresses geographical and cultural borders and thus comes to represent a threat. The sentiment that Islam is invading their territory, the fear of losing one's 'home', is widely expressed in the context of Islamophobic violence. This provides both motive and rationale for injurious verbal and physical assaults on Muslims. A Muslim woman speaks to a cluster of perceived threats that underlie public hostility and violence:

> For the most part, it's just, A – they feel that your overtaking their land; or B – they feel that you will never fit into society; or C – they just feel like you are

> plotting in the garage. And, like my Dad would spend an incessant amount of time in the garage ... and they would freak out because they would assume that he is making something. (Female)

Additionally, Muslim bodies – 'as mediums to show religion' – are becoming increasingly visible (Wagner 2011: 43). It is not just the rhetorical representations of Muslims that brings them to the public eye. Rather it is also the correspondence of these images with their physical presence that renders them vulnerable to harassment and violence in the public sphere. As noted at the outset, the absolute number of Muslims has grown dramatically just since the beginning of the millennium. Additionally, Wagner (2011: 43) remarks on how Muslims are much more obvious in the streets by virtue of their dress, their appearance and their mosques. 'All of a sudden', suggests a Muslim male, 'there are Muslims. There is backlash, a movement to control the "infiltration" of Muslims. There are anti-Muslim/racist radio shows and TV shows'. Muslim bodies are now increasingly within our gaze.

Muslims in Canada, since at least the 1990s, have expressed themselves bodily through their sartorial representations of identity. The experiences of participants in my study make it clear that they understand the implications of this type of visibility for attempts to further marginalize them through violence. Visibility becomes the context and impetus for outward attacks on those who 'look' Muslim. Several participants remarked on this, with particular emphasis on Muslim women's particular vulnerability. Indeed, evidence appears to be mounting that Muslim women may be unexpectedly vulnerable to Islamophobic violence (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010; Perry 2013). One woman explicitly noted that 'the people that are at most risk of receiving hate crime are the people who look visibly Muslim. Like a Muslim woman who walks down the street, and she wears a niqab'.

Another part of the Muslim community that is particularly vulnerable to hate are those who are visible by virtue of their activism. The risk of violence becomes even greater for those who are both seen and heard. The posture of entitlement taken by Muslim activists can be seen as an affront to white dominance in that they are perceived to be violating the anticipated rules of behavior. Should they step outside the permissible boundaries that define 'a good Muslim', they become vulnerable to retaliatory violence.

> I think it is this the dichotomization of the Muslim community into the good Muslim and the bad Muslim which is what allows the people who are visibly Muslim, who are cast as the bad Muslim to bear the brunt of that violence, while others of us marginally escape that. (Female)

Seen in this light, hate crime can be seen as a reactionary tool, a resource for the reassertion of whiteness over color. It is a form of 'resistance to any diminishment in the authorial claims of a particular white identity' (Hesse, Rai, Bennett and McGilchrist 1992: 172). One very active woman described the risks she withstands on a regular basis:

> We, myself, as a leader, get a lot of threatening phone calls, which are frightening. And the tone, for what they write about me; the caricature they make of me, which is remarkable, they are most disgusting. And I also wear hijab for what they do. And I think, that's very frightening. That's very, very intimidating. ... So it's a very risky thing that I do. (Female)

Bias motivated violence, then, is available as a response -- albeit a violent and extreme one -- to the Other who is out of control, who has overstepped his or her social, political or even geographical boundaries.

Empowering visibility: Becoming 'normal'

Visibility is a double edged sword. While it can provoke negative reactions, it can also be empowering (Brighenti 2007: 340). This is key to resisting the subjugation described above: to neutralize the 'normalizing gaze' by controlling it, rather than letting it control Muslims. Indeed, many Muslims with whom I spoke insisted on embracing visibility:

> I had never really worn the hijab before, but for a short period of time, right after 9/11 I started wearing it as a sign of defiance, you know? And I also knew that it wasn't my style and I wasn't going to keep it on for too long but it was definitely a time when I felt like being more visibly Muslim was necessary for me to deal with all the anti-Muslim sentiments and hate that was going around in my school. (Female)

This is a powerful reminder that persistent surveillance and categorization can be directly challenged through equally persistent expressions of Muslim identities. Visibility becomes a show of strength that reflects the wielding of power by its very subjects. It reimagines 'the performance of visible differences as the locus of political agency because of its potential to deconstruct foundational categories of identity' (Walker 1993: 868). It is, in essence, a demand for recognition and acknowledgement of their identities as valued rather than subjugated:

> A person can and should be able to be proud and say that, 'Yes, I'm a Canadian, but I also identify as this'. I want to be distinguishable, I want to, I want people to recognize me as what I want them to recognize me as. So I want to be able to walk in the street and somebody say, 'Yes this person is a Muslim and a Canadian'. (Male)

A key point of intervention in disrupting the controlling gaze is to resist the representations that underlie it, since 'one's positioning behind or beyond the thresholds of fair visibility raises the problem of the management of one's social image in one's own terms' (Brighenti 2007: 330). This is a call to render positive narratives of Islam that counter the distorted ones expressed by politicians and the media. The alternative is to construct highly visible and affirmative accounts of Islam.

For some participants, the most direct way to achieve this was thought to be through individual interactions with non-Muslims. They felt that openly sharing their own beliefs, values and rites was an important corrective. For example, 'just by simply talking to a stranger and being like "Hey. I'm not scary. I'm a friendly person". It creates an image for them and they in turn will tell, "Hey. I met this, like, Muslim girl and she's actually pretty cool"' (Female). Others spoke of their relationships with their non-Muslim friends, and how they were able to break through the stereotypes simply by being themselves.

For others, the crucial arenas for intervention were seen to be the very institutions noted earlier: politics and media. There was a strong recognition of the need to directly engage with them in order to re-image Muslims. Some spoke of the need to hold political leaders and the media accountable for shaping the operation of the normalizing – and stigmatizing – gaze. There is much work to be done in both of those contexts:

> So I think the big political leaders, not only in Canada, but global scale, the international political leaders, need to think about their rhetoric because whatever they say is taken out by the media and that sort of creates and perpetuates the image. … I think it's the politicians' responsibility not to other others and create these negative images in society. (Male)

There was, of course, some cynicism about the willingness and ability of the mainstream media to offer alternative and constructive voices. Some, then, highlighted the potential of representing themselves through Muslim-based media venues. This is an increasingly common practice among minority communities in Canada, where ethnic media provide counter discourses (Lindgren 2013). As one participant in my study put it:

> There should be a strong journalism in the Muslim community also. The youth, especially the kids. There should be some system from mosques, from Islamic centres, even from the government, where there should be a special funding on people who have good writing skills. Yes, they should write. You know that Canada is a liberal country you can do whatever you want; if they're writing against you, you counter attack them. You write what is right. (Male)

The point of these interventions is to resist the 'dividing practices' to which I alluded early in the paper. The challenge for Muslim communities is to defy categorization as the dangerous other, to overcome the sentiment noted earlier wherein the more Muslim one is, the less Canadian they are held to be. On the one hand, this demands that Muslims develop within their own communities the sense of belonging, of sharing both Muslim *and* Canadian identities:

> We should realize that as Muslims, we can live here and become Canadians as well. Like, there should be no clash between the two, between Canadian and Muslim, you know? Like both of them can become as one. And the two do not, are not against each other. (Female)

This turns the 'normalizing gaze' on its head, where the intent is to, in fact normalize rather than *ab*normalize Muslims. They are to become recognized as part of the broader acceptable ethnic landscape of this multicultural nation. This sober sentiment is captured in the following otherwise humourous assessment:

> One thing, which is a good sign for me, that our community is being accepted, is when our young sisters in hijab are being flirted, flirted with by non-Muslims! Non-Muslim young men are flirting with hijabi women. And you say, 'Well what kind of a statement is that?'! I'm saying it because, the hijab has, is becoming normal . . . Our presence is becoming normal. That's when we fit in; then we belong and we're not the other. There is no us and them; it's us. (Male)

Contrast this with the statement cited earlier wherein a Muslim woman protested that popular images construct Muslims as *not* normal. Instead, underlying the humour here is the assumption that only when Muslims can live visibly and without othering can they truly feel themselves to be within the bounds of what is considered Canadian. Only then does visibility cease to be a trap. Instead, it becomes yet another marker of what it is to be Canadian.

Conclusion

The post-9/11 context across the West unquestioningly presents challenges for increasingly visible Muslim communities. Yet the narratives shared here are an important reminder that those challenges also present opportunities. This paper has highlighted the ways in which the transformed and transformative visibility of Muslim communities in Canada has been simultaneously disempowering and empowering. The ambiguity of visibility is what makes it a valuable resource for affirming Muslim identities and agency. By turning their faces toward rather than away from 'the gaze', Muslims 'symbolize their demands for social justice by celebrating visible signifiers of difference that have historically targeted them for discrimination' (Walker 1993: 868).

Framing Muslims' stories within Brighenti's (2007) understanding of visibilities, I have highlighted the impact of being constantly seen in terms of discursive representations, state and popular surveillance and harassment, and finally, Muslim activism. Political and media distortions render largely one dimensional images of Muslims that separate them out as 'not Canadian' by virtue of their putative values and 'inherent' connection to terrorism. These constructs, then, draw attention to the communities by directing a normalizing gaze in their direction. By virtue of their recognition and their physical presence, they become (re)marked, noticed, and reviled. This, then, sets them up for harassment by both state agents and members of the public who apply an array of 'dividing practices' that seek to marginalize them and thus contain the 'threat' they are thought to pose.

Yet, by the same token, many Muslims choose to consciously resist the normalizing gaze and, in fact, celebrate their visibility as a means by which to affirm their normalcy *rather than* abnormalcy, and their identities as Muslim *and* Canadian. In brief, the conclusion to be drawn is that, on the one hand, Muslims have been rendered visible with the intent to distinguish and differentiate them from 'real' Canadians. Yet, on the other hand, many Muslims have also opted to render *themselves* visible with exactly the opposite intent: that is, to normalize as real 'Canadians'.

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