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Capped Equality in Multicultural Britain: Experiences of Everyday Racism in the Workplace among British Pakistani and Algerian Women

Can a Muslim minority ethnic woman enjoy equal opportunities in Britain? Framed within the British multicultural ideology –which promotes equality regardless of ethnic, religious and cultural differences– a 'yes' would undoubtedly be the only answer to this question. This idealised vision of society is, however, far from representing the position of minority ethnic groups in the United Kingdom (UK). Contemporary Britain is witnessing across-group relationships driven by assumptions of an impossible social cohesion especially between Muslims and other (religious) groups, inevitably affecting the life experiences of the former. So the answer to the above question might not be a straightforward 'yes' after all.

Situated at the intersection of various social divisions, British Muslim minority ethnic women occupy a very particular position within these group relationships. These women's position in society is constructed by the intersection of (notably) their gender, ethnicity, religion and nationality. More importantly, women who display their religious identity (e.g. by wearing headscarves) are easily identifiable as Muslims by the people they interact with and so, as Afshar (2008) noted, they become symbolic representatives of Islam. In addition to their association with negative discourses of Islam, these women are identified in relation to stereotypes (such as being illiterate) and thus, become subject of unequal treatment in society, especially in the labour market (e.g. Kamemou *et al.*, 2013). It is this very complex positioning of British Muslim minority ethnic women that this paper examines by exploring experiences of inequalities in the workplace among Pakistani and Algerian graduate women, born and educated in Britain.

Overview of existing research on the economic inequalities experienced by British Muslim minority ethnic women offers analyses of the women's access to employment and their outcomes (e.g. Khattab, 2012). The discussion presented here focuses on Muslim Pakistani and Algerian

women's experiences of inequalities *in* the workplace, that is to say, while the women are in employment. The data presented is based on interviews conducted between 2012 and 2013 with six British Pakistani and six British Algerian graduate women. All women were educated in Britain and were either born in the country or arrived before the age of 3 (i.e. before the start of their schooling). Among this group, half of the women wore the headscarf (four Algerians and two Pakistanis). This data is derived from the author's doctoral research on the educational and professional positions of second generation Muslim women in France and Britain.

The findings reveal the existence of symbolic violence perpetuated by the women's non-Muslim and white co-workers. This symbolic violence is experienced by the women in the form of social and emotional exclusions in the workplace. The findings also highlight the simultaneous experiences of inclusion (i.e. by being employed) and exclusion (e.g. by being socially rejected by colleagues) in the workplace. This research suggests that equality can be 'capped'. In other words, professional equality (i.e. successful economic access and outcome) is no warrant of social and emotional equality in the workplace (for the women in this study).

MUSLIMS AS THE 'OTHER' IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN: THE SHIFTING PROCESS OF IDENTIFICATION FROM AN ETHNIC GROUP TO A RELIGIOUS GROUP

The conceptualisation of Muslims as the 'other' in the West has been the subject of discussion since the 1970s, notably with Said's Orientalism thesis. Said (1979) stated that Muslims in the West have become the cultural representatives of fixed sets of meanings associated with Islamic nations such as extremism, fundamentalism and backwardness. This discourse positions Islam outside the West and the identity of Muslim people is fixed to that of an imaginary Muslim nation. In his discussion on the othering process, Goldberg (2009) further noted that the construction of the 'other' is inextricably linked with specific times, histories and places. Every country's political specificity creates its own 'other(s)'. The events of September 11th 2001 represent such specific times for the West in general. Analysing the impact of these events on the position of Muslims in the West, Rattansi (2007) argued that they crystallised sacred boundaries and strengthened the supposed impossible

co-existence between Muslim minority ethnic groups and the majority ethnic groups in western countries.

In Britain, the events of September 11th and more specifically the London Bombings of July 2005 intensified the debate on the alleged incompatible positions of Muslims in western countries but they did not initiate it. Indeed, this debate existed well before these events. In 1997, the Runnymede Trust warned about the development of an Islamophobic atmosphere in the UK. It defined Islamophobia as 'the unfair exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society and as the 'unfounded' hostility targeted against those who are visible as Muslims' (Runnymede Trust, 1997, 4). Many scholars investigated this increasing hostility towards people of Muslim faith. Poynting and Mason (2007), for example, suggested that continuous attacks on Muslim migrant groups, such as Bangladeshis living in Tower Hamlets in the 1990s, marked the shift from racist attacks on minority ethnic groups (notably between the 1960s and 1980s) to Islamophobic attacks on *Muslim* minority ethnic groups. The authors thus highlighted the intersection of ethnicity and religion in giving way to the now widespread Islamophobia. As a result, arguably, cultural, linguistic and political disparities no longer form the only basis for the othering process; rather adherence to a specific religion (i.e. Islam) has become the epitome of the 'other' in contemporary Britain.

These constructions of otherness have been ubiquitous for the past 20 years as a result of the existence of debates on and reactions to a range of issues involving Muslims. For example, summer 2014 witnessed the investigation led by the police, the Birmingham City Council and the Department of Education, into several state schools in Birmingham alleged to impose fundamentalist values on staff and pupils (Wintour, 2014). This event is built on the on-going debates over Muslim faith schools, as noted by Flint (2007). Among many others, this example has contributed to sustaining the constructions of negative reactions and attitudes towards Muslims in Britain.

This continuous identification of Muslims as unwanted, eternally different and backward blurs the boundaries between migrants and their UK-born children. These fixed identifications, indeed, do not differentiate between British Muslims and migrant Muslims. This contributes to the assumption of unbridgeable differences between the white majority ethnic and religious groups, on the one hand, and Muslim minority ethnic groups, on the other hand. The latter are viewed as a uniform

group, overlooking ethnic and national specificities. From a feminist standpoint, this fixed identification also undermines the particular positions of women who are Muslim.

RELIGION AND GENDER: MUSLIM WOMEN THE ULTIMATE 'OTHER'?

Feminist writers have emphasised the centrality of gender in a new othering process in the West. In keeping with Said's Orientalism thesis, Weedon (2004), for example, suggested that the 'visual iconography' is paramount in the depiction of Muslims as unable to fit into western countries (18). Muslims are defined as 'other' in relation to a white norm on the basis of how they look; the body, she argued, is central in the ascription of fixed sets of meaning. In that respect, as Afshar and her colleagues (2006) further suggested, the image of women in headscarves and niqab (i.e. face veils) has become a physical representation of the Muslim 'other'. Put differently, the Islamic attire of Muslim women (including headscarf and niqab) is used by the white majorities to position 'visibly' Muslim women as the ultimate Muslim 'other', easily identifiable and thus subject of swift negative othering.

In theory, in the UK, Muslim women have the freedom of choice regarding the display of their religious identity through wearing the headscarf and/or niqab. There are indeed no bans on wearing Islamic dresses in the UK, unlike in other western European countries such as France[1]. Nevertheless, Britain is also facing debates about whether there should be such bans. For instance, in 2007, a school teacher in West Yorkshire was dismissed for wearing a niqab while teaching; the decision was upheld in the court case that followed the dismissal (United Kingdom Employment Appeal Tribunal, 2007). More recently, several hospitals have adopted similar policies which indicate that the face should not be covered while in contact with and/or treating patients (NHS Employers, 2013). Although there is no British legislation restricting the face veil, in 2013, the former Home Office Minister Jeremy Browne called for a 'national debate' over wearing niqabs in public places, such as in schools (BBC News, 2017).

It is important to note that there are no public and/or political debates regarding the headscarf in Britain. Absence of such legislation or debate should not, however, be equated with complete and

1 France banned the face veil in public places in 2010 and headscarf in schools in 2004.

unquestionable acceptance of the head covering practice. The headscarf has long been associated with stereotypes and negative representations. Bullock (2002), for instance, argued that the headscarf and niqab are perceived as oppressive for women in the West. This image, she added, required a missionary duty by white men as colonial conquerors to relieve and free these said-to-be imprisoned women within their own nation, and today, a similar sense of duty requires white men to free Muslim women from their male counterparts in the West. Afshar and her colleagues (2006) further suggested that the perception of Muslim women in western societies has undergone a transformation from being treated as different to being seen as a threat. Thus, while the colonised female 'other' was a desired body, initially feared for its potential to unite sexually the 'other' and white groups, the Muslim female 'other' is feared because it is a threat to the very existence of white groups.

Building on analyses of these othering processes, many scholars have provided accounts of how the transformation of these stereotypes into common knowledge impacts on the life opportunities of UK-born Muslim women. These women, born and educated in the UK, are indeed caught in what Fekete (2004) called 'an ever-expanding loop of xeno-racism' which restricts their progression in life on grounds of their religious affiliation and/or visibility (4). Afshar (2008), for example, argued that cultural stereotypes and the perpetuation of racist categorisations affect Muslim women in society as a whole, but also once they enter the labour market where they are confronted with an institutional system which uses their racialised identity to differentiate them from their white peers. These patronising and stigmatising discourses of otherness are both gendered and racialised, limiting the women's contribution to the economy and constraining their participation in public life altogether. This binary identification process, Weedon (2004) suggested, helps sustain 'inequalities, exclusions and oppression', thus restricting not only the life opportunities of Muslim migrant women but also that of their children, the second generation (154).

SECOND GENERATION MUSLIM PAKISTANI AND ALGERIAN WOMEN: EXPERIENCES OF INEQUALITIES IN EMPLOYMENT

Although there is no universally agreed definition of the term 'second generation', broadly speaking it always refers to children of immigrants. Some researchers, such as Portes and Zhou (1993), define second generations as children born in the country with at least one

parent born abroad or children who arrived in the country before the age of 12. Others, such as Heath and Demireva (2014), consider the age of arrival in the country to distinguish between foreign-born children and those born in the host country of their parents. These distinctions are indeed important for a discussion of the educational and employment experiences of the second generation because children who arrived as adolescents in the country of migration are likely to have had different primary education compared to their counterparts born and educated in the country. This difference is not negligible, as important knowledge is built during primary education such as language proficiency and understandings of cultural practices which affect interactions with others.

Although the term is widely applied in the literature on children of immigrants, its use has been criticised by some scholars since it creates a binary categorisation, between first (i.e. parents) and second generations (i.e. children). Anthias (1992), for example, argued that such categorisation assumes differences in terms of the perceived 'better' socialisation and adaptation of children of immigrants to the culture of their country of birth compared to their immigrant parents[2]. She further added that this understanding undermines the specificities of experiences between immigrants and their children and within the group itself, that are shaped by different intersecting factors.

Although the use of the term is debated, there is evidence of differential experiences among groups on the basis of their arrival or birth in the country which cannot be ignored since these affect individuals' life opportunities (as shown by Heath and Demireva, 2014). While the limitations of this term are acknowledged, in this paper, the term second generation is used to highlight the specificity of the experiences of British-born children of immigrants compared to the experiences of those who arrived in the country at a later stage, as adults.

The assumption that immigrants and their British-born children have differential experiences is precisely what many researchers have sought to dismantle. In his discussion on multiculturalism in Britain, Rattansi (2011) indicated that despite being born and bred in Britain, questions are raised regarding the second generations and their participation in, and engagement with, the wider society. These perceptions, he continued, are similar to the stereotypes associated with their immigrant

2 Nevertheless, the term remains important in the analysis of the particular positions of this group of people who are different from, and share similarities with, both their parents and their peers from other majority and minority ethnic groups.

parents which ultimately lead to experiences of exclusion. This is particularly true for children of Muslim immigrants who experience high degree of disadvantages in different social spheres, notably in employment.

It is important to note that experiences in the labour market are not uniform for all since differences exist within the overarching Muslim category. Brah (1993), for example, rightly highlighted the importance of considering intersecting social divisions notably in terms of gender and ethnicity. She further argued that colonial history plays a significant role in the social constructions of Muslim women's identity and subsequent professional experiences in Britain.

Many quantitative studies offer a useful insight into the condition of employment of Muslim minority ethnic women in Britain compared to white men and/or women and/or other minority ethnic women. For instance, Khattab (2012) examined the employment positions of South Asian Muslim women (including Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis). He analysed the *2001 Census data for England and Wales* and established that Muslim Pakistani graduate women are less likely to be in full-time employment or in senior/managerial roles compared to white British women. He further showed that Muslim Indian women are more likely than Muslim Pakistani and Bangladeshi women to secure managerial and professional occupations. His study points to, what Heath and Cheung (2006) termed, ethnic penalties in the labour market. In other words, Khattab (2012) showed the existence of social and economic disadvantages experienced by Muslim Pakistani and Bangladeshi women on ethnic *and* religious grounds since the groups lag behind both Muslim Indian women *and* white women. By deconstructing the 'Muslim' category, Khattab's (2012) research provides a useful insight into the complex relationship between religion and ethnicity in the labour market.

In their mixed method research on young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women's education and employment situations, Dale and her colleagues (2002) showed that with low educational qualifications, both groups of women are likely to occupy low professional positions. In a separate study, Dale (2008) also reported the concerns of some of her Pakistani and Bangladeshi interviewees about the possibility to combine marriage life and work, highlighting the importance of the family in the decision making process. The authors also noted that a higher level of qualification allowed women to better negotiate their social positions with their husband; pointing to their participants' feelings of empowerment as a result of completing lengthy education. They also suggested

that physical appearance (including wearing headscarves and traditional clothes) limits the access to jobs for both Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, which corroborates the findings of previous studies such as the work of Rana and his colleagues (1998) on racial discrimination in the recruitment process. Recent interview evidence (with employees and employers), such as Kamenou and her colleagues' 2013 study, also looked at how particular 'visible' markers (clothing and hairstyle) and religious beliefs negatively impact on Pakistani and other minority ethnic women's perception among work colleagues.

All these studies strongly emphasised the intersection of gender, ethnicity, religion and education in the construction of second generation South Asian Muslim women's professional positions. Social disadvantages together with the negative identifications to which these women are subjected, influence their progression in the labour market. More importantly, women who are highly qualified (i.e. educated to a university level) gain the lowest returns on their academic qualifications. As Rafferty (2012) noted, they are more likely to be unemployed and/or under-employed compared to white women with similar qualifications, despite their higher educational level.

Unlike Pakistanis, Algerians in Britain are a newly-settled minority ethnic group who has been the subject of little scholarly attention. Existing research is limited to mapping the group's settlement in the UK (such as the work carried out by the Migration Policy Research) and to conceptualising their 'non-traditional' migration pathway (e.g. Collyer, 2003). There is, however, no research evidence on the professional positions of second generation Algerians in the UK.

Nonetheless, existing literature on other newly-settled minority ethnic groups in the UK offers a useful analytical framework for understanding the social experiences of second generation Algerians. Archer and Francis (2006), for example, studied the educational attainment of second generation Chinese pupils. The authors used a social class and ethnic perspective to explain the group's educational patterns. On the one hand, they concluded that parents' input in their children's education (partly) explains young pupils' academic success whether at primary, secondary or tertiary level. On the other hand, the intersection of social class and ethnic inequalities were used to account for the disadvantages the group faces in the labour market despite succeeding academically. Thus, ethnic penalties not only seem to affect established minority ethnic groups (such as Pakistanis), but also the less-established

ones. Bearing in mind the importance of social class and ethnicity and the existence of subsequent inequalities, a similar pattern can be expected for second generation Algerian women (and men).

All in all, existing quantitative literature offers a limited understanding of equality in the labour market by documenting mainly access to employment and employment outcomes among second generation Muslim minority ethnic women compared to their white and/or other minority ethnic peers. Although qualitative/mixed-method research provides discussions on the groups' negotiation practices within their families, these do not include negotiation practices within the workplace. Moreover, both quantitative and qualitative studies predominantly investigate the position of the larger Muslim minority ethnic groups (such as the Pakistanis). Building on this literature, the findings presented here focus on graduate women from two Muslim minority ethnic groups, namely Pakistanis and Algerians, and on their particular experiences within their respective workplaces. In doing so, this paper takes an intersectional approach for the discussions on equality in the workplace by examining the simultaneous effect of gender, ethnicity, (visible) religion and nationality.

EXPERIENCES OF EVERYDAY RACISM IN THE WORKPLACE

All the British women interviewed for this study insisted that the UK's multicultural framework guarantees every single individual their right to be treated as equal and to practise their religion freely. Many participants, especially Pakistanis, acknowledged the existence of racism and discrimination in the 1960s and 1970s. This acknowledgment was built on the experiences of some of the women's parents and/or older family members. However, for them, the current situation has improved so as to eliminate inequalities from society. To support this statement, many British participants recounted positive relationships with their work colleagues especially with regard to their ethnic and religious identities. For example, many talked about their freedom to discuss religious and cultural practices with white colleagues who were not Muslim. No British woman recalled experiencing any form of direct racism. Yet, racism need not be explicit; it can take up the form of subtle occurrences. These occurrences are what Essed (1991) called everyday racism.

Essed argued that everyday racism allows the analysis of micro level processes of inequalities based on racialised differences 'through

the eyes of those who [are] considered not to belong, not to be part of the norm' in a white-dominated society (125). Everyday racism is 'familiar and repetitive' racism that can take the form of behaviour and/or unspoken words which are not tangible and therefore are left 'unquestionable', creating conflict and uncertainty (Essed, 1991, 52).

Thus, while all the British participants claimed to have never experienced racism and discrimination, on numerous occasions, their experiences were embedded with stories of social exclusion in the workplace, a form of everyday racism. The negation of their experiences as racist and/or discriminatory is associated with the fact that experiences of everyday racism are hard to recognise and tackle (as argued by Essed, 1991). To illustrate the existence of this particular form of subtle and invisible racism in the workplace, the following discussion elaborates on the stories of two women whose experiences at work were similar to the rest of the British participants': Mariam (Pakistani) and Malika (Algerian)[3].

Mariam is a 35-year-old married woman who holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Literature. At the time of her interview, she was working with her local council as an unqualified social worker but only part-time so that she could care for her young daughter. Mariam does not wear the headscarf.

As most of the other British participants, Mariam agreed to be interviewed twice. Throughout her first interview, Mariam expressed her wish to pursue a new degree in order to become a *qualified* social worker. This decision was motivated by her current employment conditions. She explained not being paid an equal salary to her co-workers who hold a degree in social work and this, despite carrying similar duties. Mariam then also shared concerns regarding her position within her family. She felt being undermined by her husband and mother for not completing her Master's degree. Indeed, not being interested in literature at a postgraduate level, Mariam passed only half of her Master's modules and received a Postgraduate Diploma instead of a degree. Accordingly, gaining a new qualification would not only mean gaining an equal position within her workplace but also raising her esteem amongst her family members. During her follow-up interview (12 months after the first), Mariam explained that she was unable to secure funding from her employer and so, she had to drop her plans of completing a degree in social work. Mariam's discussion of her employment conditions suggested an

[3] Names are pseudonyms.

understanding (on her behalf) of her experiences of inequalities only in terms of pay gap (that she explained as a result of *her* lacking adequate qualifications) and in terms of social relationships (that she explained as a result of the disappointment *she* incurred to her family members after dropping out of her Master's course). In both cases, Mariam justified her experiences of inequalities by blaming herself. The way Mariam made sense of her current experiences of inequalities mirrored her explanation of her experiences of racism at work.

The following extract is taken from Mariam's first interview. It occurred during a discussion of previous research findings on the existence of racism in society. Initially, Mariam was 'quite shocked' to find out about the existence of racism in the labour market. She tried to make sense of it by distinguishing between the private and public sectors and then hesitantly recounted a past experience by adopting a new lens (i.e. assessing whether indeed she has been victim of racism or not):

> When I worked for [renowned TV channel] I did feel that there was mainly a white workforce. Maybe (pause) I did feel a little bit left out then. (I probed) hmm…well because…I don't know the way they were treated. Maybe they were treated better or maybe I was just a bit sensitive or a bit naïve, I don't know. I just felt that (long pause). You know I'm not really sure (pause). It's like when I was around they behaved differently. It's the way they wouldn't include me in conversations or you know the way you chitchat at work. There wasn't that. It's like they had their own clique and I felt left out. I mean I was part of the team, don't get me wrong, but there wasn't anyone (stopped); the majority were white (stopped)…I mean work-wise yes I was included but not like, I mean relational-wise. And I think it was the culture, the going outs after work, to pubs after work, that kind of things so I kind of felt left out, that kind of thing.

Note how Mariam found it difficult to put words on her feeling ('I am not really *sure*'; broken response signalled with three periods; and short pauses in her narration), which well illustrates the challenges associated with recognising instances of subtle racism, as Essed (1991) suggested. Minimising the extent of the actual impact ('maybe I was just a bit sensitive or a bit naive') allowed Mariam to normalise the situation and to not even recognise it as a racist practice. She then shifted the 'blame' and identified her own behaviour of not joining in, 'the going outs after work, to pubs after work' as the explanation for her social exclusion at work. She, therefore, provided a causal effect between the events (i.e. she was left out because she did not participate in after work social life). It became easier for Mariam to deal with this situation knowing that *she* was in control (i.e. *she* did not socialise) rather than

being subjected to it (i.e. *they* left her out). She foregrounded her experience of social exclusion in ethnic differentiation (note the repetition of white workforce); yet, she described how she did not engage in practices that were in conflict with her faith (going to pubs and drinking). Religion in this instance is a cause of indirect discrimination (she does not drink alcohol, so she is excluded). Because the British women in this study are exposed to, and strongly imbued with, discourses of tolerance and equality, they did not view the ordinary and negative attitudes of certain colleagues as manifestation of racism, especially since they experienced social inclusion and exclusion simultaneously. For example, Mariam was economically included as she occupied a professional job but experienced subtle racism (i.e. no physical act occurred and no racist words were spoken in the construction of her social exclusion). This partly explains the difficulty Mariam faced in assessing the events and responding to them. She ultimately decided to leave, claiming 'the job was boring'. Denying that hers was an experience of racism enabled Mariam (and many other British women) to sustain a coherent identity during the interview as a *strong, independent and professional* woman and to dis-identify with minority ethnic women who are *victims* of racism/discrimination. In doing so, Mariam also keeps a coherent understanding of her experiences of inequalities (i.e. only linked to pay gap at work and social relationships in the family).

Many other British women in this study experienced similar subtle racism but specific intersecting factors were involved in that process. The experiences of British Pakistani and Algerian women, who like Mariam, did not wear headscarves were constructed by the intersection of ethnicity, religion and gender; while the experiences of those who did wear headscarves were constructed by the simultaneous effect of their gender and the *visibility* of their religion. Such were the experiences of Malika, a 26-year-old Algerian woman who covers her hair.

Unlike Mariam, Malika was not married nor had children at the time of her first interview. When discussing her transition from education to work, Malika shared her experiences of unstable professional positions. After earning a Master's in Psychology, she worked as an assistant psychologist researcher on a voluntary basis while pursuing a paid job in sectors unrelated to her qualifications (i.e. shop assistant). Despite encountering these difficulties, Malika attributed her struggles to her lack of relevant work experience and her position as new graduate. She continuously maintained that she had never experienced any racist or discri-

minatory practices during her employment. However, when Malika discussed her current work experiences in more details, a relatively different picture emerged.

Malika joined her current employer three years ago as a voluntary member of staff. A year later, she moved into a paid position. Similar to Mariam, Malika would like to study further. She would like to apply for a doctorate in psychology funded by her current employer. However, for the past two years, she had several failed applications. The following extract is a comment Malika made when asked as to why she thinks she has been unsuccessful in getting the funding so far:

> Hmm (long pause) I am not sure [why I have been unsuccessful], I think, I mean it has been a lot more difficult hmm for me to get onto [the doctoral] training than maybe other white people that I know, that just (very long pause) you know actually, that haven't had to apply a second or third time and have got already on the training course with little experience. That just makes you wonder. Hmm (long pause) but I am not sure. […] So someone I worked with, he was offered a job, we had the same job, and he got on the training *but* I had more experience than him. (pause) There have been other people, who got on the training and hmm and yeah, I was here longer than them. I guess, for [the recruiters], maybe I am less able to kind of fit in or maybe [the other applicants] had better grades. I think, possibly, they might have been even better candidates than me.

Although she initially stated that she had not experienced any form of racism or discrimination, through the interview process, Malika realised that she had indeed been discriminated against in favour of white male colleagues less competent and less experienced than her ('white people […] got already on the training course with little experience'/'I had more experience than him'/'I was here longer than them'). Although she did not use the term 'discrimination', Malika questioned whether the perception that she was 'less able to kind of fit in' influenced the outcome of her applications. She was well-aware of her physical appearance (i.e. headscarf) and the possible negative effect it could have on recruiters. Yet, despite considering a possible case of religious discrimination, Malika understood her experience of rejection in terms of ethnic and gender differences rather than religious differences (note the references to 'white people' and to her male colleague). She then questioned her own ability to secure the funding suggesting that her co-workers were 'better candidates than [her]'. This shift in making sense of her experience (i.e. first as possible discrimination and then blaming herself) is consistent with her overall story of freedom of religion and

the existence of meritocracy in British society, similar to Mariam's and the other British women's beliefs.

The stories of Mariam and Malika illustrate the complexity of the processes of identification of British Muslim minority ethnic women in this study (i.e. how they position themselves in society compared to others). The intersection of their ethnic/religious identity and professional identity was challenged since, as Weedon (2004) argued, certain characteristics, such as working as professionals, are attributed to the white groups only. Both stories showed that despite successfully passing the interview stage and securing the job, racist assumptions that only white employees are able to perform given roles reinforce power relationships between the two women, seen as 'illegitimate' members of their respective professional work environment, and the white groups, seen as 'legitimate' members. In that respect, the British participants' experiences of equality at work were capped. On the one hand, Malika's progression into senior role (by completing a PhD) is continuously hindered since her PhD applications continue to fail in favour of less-qualified white male colleagues. On the other hand, Mariam's experience of isolation at work led her to leave her job and become unemployed. Her opportunity to evolve in a paid position was restricted because of unwelcoming non-Muslim white colleagues. In other words, securing employment is not, in essence, a warrant of equality at work. The women were re-located to a position of inferiority and ultimately othered on the basis of their religious and ethnic identities. Therefore, they enjoy(ed) only a restricted form of equality.

Yet both women dismissed their experiences of inequality at work by undermining the extent of those experiences (e.g. 'work-wise I was included', Mariam) and by putting the blame on themselves and questioning their competencies (e.g. '[others applicants] had better grades', Malika). The similarity in both women's stories further suggests that experiences of inequalities at work cross ethnic and 'physical' (i.e. wearing headscarves or not) boundaries. The difference is found in only how the women made sense of their experiences. Mariam, who did not wear the headscarf, framed her experiences in terms of ethnic differences; whereas Malika, who does, referred to the visibility of her religion. Both women's experiences at work resonate with the stories of the other British Pakistani and Algerian participants in this study.

CONCLUSION: CAPPED EQUALITY OR EXCLUSION DESPITE INCLUSION IN EMPLOYMENT

The prominence of Britain's multicultural discourse has rendered it almost impossible for all the British Pakistani and Algerian women in this study to recognise and thus to fight cases of religious/ethnic discrimination and racism at work precisely because these are *unspoken* and *invisible*. Despite their strong beliefs in the multicultural discourse, all the British women's experiences of equality were capped (at one point or another in their professional career) because of their racialised identifications. The women I interviewed experienced different forms of inequalities, manifested through everyday racism, because they were seen as 'illegitimate' members in their work environment who cannot claim their right to graduate-level professional jobs. In that respect, the position of all the British Muslim women as professional women was not appreciated (in one way or another) because of their ethnic and/or religious identifications. Thus, inclusion in the labour market (through occupying professional jobs) does not necessarily mean social equality in the sense of acceptance by co-workers and availability of equal career progression opportunities within the workplace.

Besides, the lack of ethnic mix in the workplace and/or less-friendly work environments also contributed to the women's sense of isolation at work. This was particularly true in social interactions with white colleagues (both men and women) who were not Muslims. Negative work environments compelled many British Pakistani and Algerian women to return to unstable professional positions (e.g. women who quitted) and/or suffer from psychological oppression (e.g. women who accepted being incompetent).

Inevitably then, being a Muslim minority ethnic graduate woman, one cannot always claim to equality on all levels. The experiences of the British Pakistani and Algerian women in this study suggest that professional equality can be capped. These women experienced exclusion at work despite being included. Their acceptance in their respective jobs is weighed against the (visibility of) their ethnic and/or religious identities and not the qualifications they gained and/or their work experiences. Their racialised identities, based on the intersection of gender, ethnicity and (visibility of) religion, thus produced unfair treatment at work. This discussion further suggests the pervasive nature of racism in Britain, wherein Muslims are continuously positioned as the 'other', unwanted

and eternally different. Racism persists despite the existence of a multi-cultural framework supposedly guarantying equal opportunities for all.

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