

Collective Trauma and the Muslim Women of the Christchurch Attack: An Observational and Media Study

Mahsheed Ansari & Mirela Cufurovic

The language of trauma has been used by many to explain what happens, not only to themselves as individuals, but to the collectivities to which they belong to as well. Some of these traumatic experiences stem from interpersonal violence, such as sexual and physical abuse or domestic violence, while others may stem from witnessing interpersonal violence and victimisation, such as witnessing or being a victim of a serious accident, war, a terror attack, or experiencing the loss of a loved one. Regardless of its cause, trauma, whether individualistic or collective, arises from the experience of pain and suffering post ‘an extraordinary event’ so disruptive that it triggers an emotional response and public attention. This chapter will situate the experiences of trauma felt by the surviving Muslim women victims of the Christchurch terror attack that occurred on March 15, 2019, within the scope of collective trauma theory. We do this by examining two types of collective trauma unique to the Christchurch experience: collective trauma through personal experience and collective trauma through empathy. Although our focus is on the Muslim women victims and survivors of the attack, we also show how ‘meaning making’ processes such as the media and New Zealand government helped define the type of pain and suffering felt by the victims, and how this was translated into a wider form of collective suffering whereby both the Muslim community, the community of New Zealand, and those abroad felt victimised by the event on a traumatic level.

Mahsheed Ansari is the Higher Degrees Research Co-ordinator and lecturer in Islamic Studies at Centre of Islamic Studies and Civilisation, Charles Sturt University.

Mirela Cufurovic is the managing editor of Australian Journal of Islamic Studies and a Research Associate at the Centre of Islamic Studies and Civilisation, Charles Sturt University.