

A FEMINIST FIGHT FOR FAITH:
HOW MUSLIM WOMEN RECLAIM ISLAM IN THE WEST

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A FEMINIST FIGHT FOR FAITH: HOW MUSLIM WOMEN RECLAIM ISLAM
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My dissertation examines the emergence of gender justice activism among second-generation Muslim women in Britain and the United States. This research focuses on activists who attempt to reclaim Islam's 'original egalitarian spirit,' a position they argue revolutionized women's status in the seventh century. Despite differences between the Muslim populations in both of these countries, I argue that similar gender justice campaigns reveal the significant roles that both gender and generation play in forming political identities. The dissertation offers a typological theory of gender justice claims, categorized according to two dimensions: targets and frames. Targets are classified according to whether they are *representative* claims in the public sphere or *reinterpretive* claims in the private sphere. Frames differentiate between claims that seek short-term fixes to inequitable outcomes and those that fight structural causes of inequality. Through a combination of original interview data with Muslim women activists in both countries and content analysis of media constructions of the Muslim identity, I argue that second-generation Muslim women activists in both Britain and the U.S. construct a new Muslim political identity for the multicultural political project--a new *egalitarian Muslim identity* based on the idea that Islam promotes and protects women's rights.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Julie Ajinkya is the daughter of Indian immigrants who migrated to the United States and settled in New Jersey, where she was born and raised. Her childhood was a constant exercise in understanding how immigrant communities balance customs and traditions from their sending countries with those of their new home countries. Ultimately, however, she grew to believe that the xenophobia that immigrants faced shared a great deal in common with the discrimination that other marginalized, non-majority groups experienced—and that social movements played a crucial role in fighting this injustice. She carried her belief in community grassroots movements to Amherst College in Amherst, MA, where she studied Political Science and graduated *magna cum laude* in 2003, and became a political activist for various progressive causes. After graduation, she received the Ford Foundation’s New Voices Fellowship to work at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C. as a political organizer with Foreign Policy in Focus. In 2005, she decided to continue her own research on social movements, gender, and immigration and enrolled at Cornell University to pursue her Ph.D. in Government. She is married to her best friend from her graduate program, Benjamin Brake, and currently lives in Washington, D.C.

For Ben, my rock.

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CHAPTER 1
MULTICULTURALISM AND THE MUSLIM IDENTITY: A TYPOLOGICAL
THEORY OF GENDER-JUSTICE CLAIMS

One of the most prominent challenges the modern nation-state faces in the twenty first century is the just management of diverse populations. Liberal states in particular face the dilemma of managing cultural difference through granting group-specific rights, while still prioritizing the autonomy and individualism that reside at the heart of their political agendas. While the ‘Anglo-conformity’ model of immigration in Western states such as Britain and the United States predicts that immigrants who migrated prior to the 1960s would adapt to existing cultural norms, the 1970s saw a rise in pluralist policies that tolerated immigrant groups retaining aspects of their ethnic heritage. This transition to a ‘politics of difference’ marked the commitment to a political project called multiculturalism, in which liberal states with increasing immigration examine how they can retain a sense of national identity and individualism while also respecting the diversity of group interests that new migrants represent.

The multicultural political project should be understood as a state’s normative commitment to managing such potential conflict. For instance, to what extent does the government make diversity claims by groups an explicit part of its national policy? On one hand, there are states such as the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia that have official multicultural policies at the national level, including examples of legislation that explicitly promote different systems of law for members of ethnic groups, allow multiple citizenship for immigrants, and accept traditional dress from sending cultures. On the other hand, there are countries like the United States that do not have clearly established multicultural policies at the federal level, yet acknowledge the

incorporation of immigrant populations as part of a national narrative. In the case of the US, then, the multicultural political project manifests itself in a decentralized fashion, most evidently in education, through the rise of race and ethnic studies programs in higher education as well as the promotion of group-specific diversity in primary education. Scholars of multiculturalism note that the multicultural agenda spread across the country through curriculum during the 1970s (Kivisto and Rundblad 2000; Glazer 1998). Whether multiculturalism appears in federal policy or through decentralized arrangements, its political project reflects the state's attempt to politically manage the question of difference among an increasingly diverse polity.

One of the strongest challenges to the multicultural political project in liberal countries questions how a multiculturalism government manages illiberal behavior *within* group interests, particularly when group-specific rights are thought to violate the liberal rights of certain group members—traditionally women and children members who are given little say in determining their group's interests. The contemporary challenge to multiculturalism in the West concentrates this concern about illiberal group behavior on immigrant Muslim populations in particular. Particularly after the terrorist attacks in the US on September 11, 2001 and in Britain on July 7, 2005 that were perpetrated by Muslim extremists, both of these countries' multicultural projects sharply focused on the integration of their Muslim populations. National security concerns that originally focused on the clash between Western values and those of countries populating the Muslim world quickly translated into concerns about a fundamental clash in values between liberal democratic interests and 'Islamic values' that accompany Muslim immigrants into Western countries.

Whereas multicultural diversity has traditionally referred to racial and ethnic groups who are visibly different from majority populations, scholars argue that such security concerns and the associated 'racialization of Islam' designate Muslims as a

similarly marginalized group within the multicultural project (Razack 2008; Jamal 2008). They argue that the Western media's construction of the Muslim individual as a brown, bearded man or a brown, *hijabi*¹ woman leads to this racialization, because it equates Muslims with particular visible characteristics in the public's mindset that are then associated with certain—security-threatening—behavior.

Likewise, critics of multiculturalism also focus on Islam because they believe it to be the precise example that illustrates their concern about multiculturalism fostering illiberal behavior. Indeed, strange bedfellows are found in conservative nationalists, on one hand, who argue that increased diversity harms a necessary sense of hegemonic national identity (Huntington 2004; Fish 1997) and, on the other hand, feminists who argue that women and children often suffer exploitation at the hands of minority groups' male leaders (Okin 1999; Pollitt 1999). In the case of Islam, however, both groups operate under assumptions that Islamic values clash with Western values, whether they are ideas about modernity and democracy in the case of the former, or gender-justice in the case of the latter. Both groups ultimately argue that incorporating the Muslim political identity in the multicultural project is a dangerous endeavor and that Muslim identity and culture should be significantly regulated to protect the liberal rights of others in that society.

Feminists who argue that multiculturalism is a dangerous political project for minority women are particularly interesting because of the significant contradiction that such an argument reveals in feminist reasoning: the feminist call for women's rights may disregard a woman's *right* to prioritize her religious identity if that religious identity is deemed harmful to women. Susan Moller Okin, this argument's most vocal spokeswoman, questions whether allowing cultural groups to hold onto

¹ The *hijab* refers to the headscarf worn by Muslim women that covers their hair, but leaves the face open. *Hijabi* is the colloquial term used to refer to women who choose wear the *hijab*.

traditions from their homelands both perpetuates patriarchal practices and effectively holds minority women's rights to a lower standard than their majority counterparts (Okin 1999). This feminist critique of the multicultural project argues that the state fails to safeguard minority women's liberal rights against mistreatment from *within* their own minority group. Ultimately, Okin suggests that in cases where multiculturalism and equality may come in conflict (e.g. the ability to hold onto a cultural tradition of female genital mutilation vs. protecting the rights of minority women who do not want to practice that tradition), equality should prevail. Okin effectively relegates a woman's right to her religious identity to an example of false consciousness.

Muslim women scholars and activists, however, often disagree with such mainstream feminist assessment. Despite the fact that Okin's critique purports to have minority women's rights in mind, Muslim women argue that by portraying misogynist behavior as *inevitable* and fundamental to Islam itself, feminist critics suffer from the same androcentric trappings that they claim to challenge. Instead of conflating a number of men's misogynistic behavior with the religion itself, they argue, feminist scholars should listen to how Muslim women characterize the Muslim identity. Such arguments employ intersectionality theory to outline the importance of recognizing multiple, simultaneous oppressions—specifically, how a Muslim's religious identity might intersect with his or her gender identity (Crenshaw 1991).

I. THE ARGUMENT

In this dissertation, I argue that Muslim women scholars and activists in both Britain and the US *reclaim* Islam's position on gender-justice, as it has been constructed in both public media representation and private intracommunal

interpretations of the faith. They do so by offering an alternative version of the Muslim political identity to be used in the multicultural project that is comprised of egalitarian principles—a *new, egalitarian Muslim identity*. In doing so, such activists counter a popular understanding of Islam (and religion, broadly speaking) as a system of belief that is harmful to women’s rights. In essence, then, my dissertation attempts to argue why the term ‘Muslim feminism’ is not an oxymoron and how certain institutional arrangements in modern societies might, in fact, heighten a sense of religiosity that aims to reimagine, reinvent, or reinterpret how religions may adapt to women’s modern lives.

In exploring the construction of this new egalitarian Muslim identity, I position my argument at the crossroads of three literatures: social movement identity politics, gender politics, and immigration politics. Specifically, I engage with three central questions that illustrate the intersection between these three literatures:

- 1-Under what circumstances will Muslim women emerge as activists defending their religious identity to feminists rooted in a more secular tradition, while at the same time reclaiming how the Muslim identity has been constructed in the West by their male religious contemporaries?
- 2- How do Muslim women reconcile their gender and religious identities when they conflict, particularly when the multicultural political project in Western liberal democracies might protect group rights made in the name of religion that violate the liberal rights of the group’s female members?
- 3- How do second generation Muslim women activists challenge our assumptions about linear, unidirectional assimilation and the incorporation of diversity in Western mainstream cultures?

I address the first and second questions largely in the next two chapters where I demonstrate that gender-justice activism in both countries shares important similarities. I tackle the first question by describing how activists emerge to construct an alternative Muslim identity. Beginning with chapter two, I explain that the misrepresentation of Muslim women in the mainstream media prompts activists to publicly assert the intersection of their gender and religious identities in alternative media outlets. This is followed by chapter three, where I demonstrate how activists emerge in reaction to the misinterpretation of Islamic teachings on gender-justice within Muslim communities themselves.

I tackle the second question by describing the different forms of rebuttals that activists' claims take in reconciling both their gender and religious identities. In the next two chapters, in addition to describing why activists emerge to construct an alternative Muslim identity, I also sort activists' claims by their arenas of discourse. The project to reimagine an egalitarian Islam counters the claim that Islam is fundamentally injurious to women's rights, and adopts different strategies according to *where* the claims are made. Chapter two describes representative claims that activists make in the *public sphere*, engaging the media's public misrepresentation of the Muslim woman. Chapter three demonstrates reinterpetive claims that activists make within the *private sphere* of Muslim communities themselves, arguing that misogynistic practices are the result of misinterpreted Islamic teachings.

I address the third question about assimilation theory primarily in chapter three, because this chapter focuses on intergenerational relationships within the private area of discourse (the Muslim community). It should be no surprise that Muslim women activists oppose the *androcentric* version of Islam that has become normalized in the public and private spheres, given that they claim using the minority male as a point of reference obscures the minority female's experience. However, in chapter

three, I argue that the same activists also oppose the *primocentrism* of this version of Islam in the private sphere. As androcentric (*andro-*, male) is used to refer to perspectives that use the male as the point of reference, I use primocentric² (*primus-*, first) to refer to a perspective that uses the first generation migrant as the point of reference. Considering that an overwhelming number of activists who make these rebuttals are second generation Muslim women, this terminology gives analytical traction to their complaint that a Muslim identity that uses their first generation parents as a point of reference obscures the experience of second generation Muslims. Similarly, they argue that primocentric understandings of Islam that only acknowledge first generation Muslim immigrants in discussions of representation and group rights in the multicultural political project incorrectly assume that the second generation's attachment to the ethnic identity will dissolve as it assimilates into the mainstream. In actual fact, however, my respondents represent a group of vocal activists who suggest that the second generation might be engaged in reconstructing the composition of their minority identity group, distinct from the first generation's construction.

Next, I use chapter four to explore how rebuttals are formulated by classifying these rebuttals in a typology constructed from the intersection of the *targets* of activists' gender-justice claims and the *frames* with which they make these claims. While the typology is briefly introduced at the end of this chapter, chapter four presents the typological theory in depth and describes how the framing dimension helps clarify how activists might formulate similar rebuttals in different ways. This chapter explains the difference between *affirmative* and *transformative* frames, taking

² According to the author's knowledge, the term 'primocentric' has thus far only been used by Leonhard Praeg (2007) in his analysis of violence in Africa. He uses the term in conjunction with the prefix phalo (*phalo-*, masculine) to describe a logic as *phalo-primocentric* if it "always already (and threateningly still) violates the rights and the very being of woman and children" (Praeg 2007: 141). I employ this term in a similar way, to describe concentration on the 'first' generation, or parents.

its cue from Nancy Fraser's (1997) typology of justice struggles that differentiates between struggles that seek superficial fixes to inequitable outcomes (affirmative) and those that fight structural causes of inequality (transformative).

The fifth and final chapter attempts to tackle an interesting observation that the typology reveals—namely, that while affirmative frames appear in both countries, transformative frames seem to emerge only in the US. I suggest that the variation we see in frames is due to the fundamental differences in each country's treatment of religion, which plays a distinct historic role in each country. Its role in Britain has made the British state suspicious of religious leadership, while its role in America encourages the American state to refrain from intervening in religious community affairs as much as possible. For example, while radicalizing clerics have been allowed into both countries, the US largely abstains from censoring their abilities; its security concerns focus on defunding terrorist resources abroad by, sometimes mistakenly, prohibiting Muslim organizations from sending charitable funds overseas.³

Britain, in contrast, has tried to limit the effects such clerics might have on British Muslims—particularly *young* British Muslims—by engaging in a system of religious corporatism, where the state chooses 'moderate' Muslims to represent the Muslim community and tries to regulate the Muslim identity through these appointments. Because these leaders are almost exclusively male, this system effectively edges Muslim women out of constructing the Muslim identity in Britain, which, I argue, keeps their frames from developing into transformative ones. They are more concerned with remedying outcomes immediately, and need to keep frames affirmative to garner enough support to even generate some semblance of a collective voice.

³ It is important to note that there is considerable opposition to such measures from within the Muslim activist community. As one of the five pillars of Islam is giving alms to the poor, many Muslims consider it unjust for the state to inhibit their giving.

I suggest that the US state elevates Constitutional protections of individual rights, particularly the right of religious freedom, to such importance that it enables a form of free market religious interpretation; instead of lionizing certain religious leaders as representatives of the Muslim community, the state relationship with religion facilitates individual interpretations of Islam to speak up and be heard. Muslim organizations and activists are left to compete in the public limelight, allowing more individual renegades from voicing their transformative frames, even if many still turn to affirmative ones. I conclude that Muslim women seem to be less obstructed in America from pursuing religious activism and situate them in a historical pattern of reform movements that have used the national Constitutional narrative of individual rights to fight for social justice.

In the remainder of this chapter, I lay out the dissertation's theoretical contributions. First, I briefly explain my research design and describe the methodology I employ to conduct this research. Next, in section two, I provide an overview of the multicultural project in both Britain and the United States and explain how a disparate Muslim identity has emerged in each state's distinct context. In section three, I engage the construction of the Muslim identity in the West in order to demonstrate why activists feel they must challenge its androcentric, primocentric production. I also use this section to explain how I position this dissertation's argument at the crossroads of the three literatures mentioned above—social movement identity politics, gender politics and immigration politics—and how this alternative Muslim identity formulates an important theoretical and empirical contribution to each field. Finally, in section four, I briefly introduce the typology of gender-justice claims, classified according to the different targets and frames that activists employ.

A. Research Design

Examining what is considered to be ‘the Muslim identity’ in these two countries poses certain difficulties, considering the different configuration of the Muslim population that has emerged in each state’s historical context. While the Muslim population in Britain primarily hails from rural impoverished areas of South Asia and continues to rank as its poorest minority community, the American Muslim immigrant community is from both Arab and South Asian countries and claims a reliable middle class status, generally mirroring the education and employment rates of the rest of the country. Moreover, the fact that British-born Muslims executed the 2005 London bombings sharpened the British state’s treatment of domestic Muslims, treating them as potential security threats. In contrast, the 2001 American attacks were carried out by foreign-born Muslims, and the state’s rhetoric towards American-born Muslims largely differentiates them from threats posed by Muslims abroad.

Given these differences between the two Muslim populations, I employ a paired comparison of most-different systems to interrogate why a similar form of gender-justice activism emerges among a subset of second generation Muslim women in both countries. Przeworski and Teune (1970) theorize a most-similar and most-different systems design, where the former explains a dissimilar outcome between two similar systems by identifying variation in an independent variable and the latter uses a common independent variable between two different systems to explain a similar outcome.⁴ While many studies usually use countries as the ‘systems’ in such research designs, I argue that sub-communities can also exhibit similar or dissimilar traits that affect the behavior of its members; accordingly, I believe the British and American

⁴ This approach is similar to John Stuart Mill’s (1892) methods of similarity and difference, but Przeworski and Teune’s approach has been argued to be more appropriate for political analysis than the experimental method implicit in Mill’s approach (Tarrow 2010).

Muslim populations should be understood as most-different systems. This paired comparison allows us to identify why we observe surprisingly similar forms of gender-justice activism emerging among second generation Muslim women in both countries, even though they belong to two most-different ‘systems’ of Muslim populations.

The benefits of employing a paired comparison design, in regards to the project at hand, outweigh its pitfalls. While the paired comparison is often criticized for comparing too few cases with too many variables, this method combines descriptive depth through close process-tracing with the analytical traction provided by identifying an independent variable and examining its effect on outcomes of interest in not only one, but two cases. Other criticisms of this research design assume that cases are chosen atheoretically, represent extremes, or ignore scope conditions of a prior theory (Tarrow 2010). However, Britain and the US are chosen as specific cases in this study because both countries have “gone through similar experience” (terrorist attacks perpetrated by Muslim individuals that forced the state to confront a Muslim political identity) and are experiencing “similar phases at the same time” (incorporating the Muslim minority population into a multicultural political project), which make them “obvious subjects for paired comparison” (Tarrow 2010: 247).

It is important to note, however, that the limits of any small n study also exist in my research design. I deliberately selected my respondents on the basis of their activism, and therefore do not make generalizations across the entire Muslim, or even Muslim female, population. As I move forward with my analysis, it will remain imperative to remember that my respondents are activists who choose to politicize the crossroads of their gender and religious identities; the impact of my respondents’ activism and political organization on the broader Muslim community is certainly a topic for future research, yet one that unfortunately lies beyond the scope of this

dissertation. Admittedly, however, my sample of respondents could be a self-selected group of activists willing to speak to an American researcher, or share a similar perspective on gender-rights in Islam. For these reasons, I also explore the diversity *within* these activist communities in the second half of this dissertation.

While it should also be noted that the terrorist attacks in Britain were committed by British- born Muslim men, whereas in the US they were committed by foreign-born Muslim men, this disparity does not fundamentally bear on the two countries' shared traditions as Western, liberal democracies that think about Islam in relation to their national security. If anything, this difference should only further support my contention that the two Muslim populations should be understood as 'most different-systems,' making the emergence of gender-justice activism in both communities a surprisingly similar outcome of interest.

Though paired comparisons are often used to demonstrate *structural* conditions that cause either a similar or dissimilar outcome of interest, I intend to demonstrate that *gender* operates as an *individual* antecedent condition and *generation* operates as a *systemic* antecedent condition—and that both of these conditions exist among activists in Britain and the US. I argue that it is these conditions, rather than structural or institutional mechanisms, that help formulate the construction of an alternative egalitarian Muslim identity. Even so, I do return to structural and institutional conditions in chapter five, when I point to each state's set of institutional arrangements and the role it plays in the frames that Muslim women activists employ.

B. Methodology

The survey data that exists on the Muslim second generation in either country is unfortunately currently limited to descriptive public opinion data. Surveys primarily ask about religious behavior (e.g. how often respondents visit the mosque, whether

women wear the *hijab*, whether men grow beards, etc.), but essentially avoid exploring deeper motivations behind such religious behavior. Additionally, there is no known survey data that identifies second generation activists waging gender-justice campaigns. Believing that data should drive methods, I found it necessary to primarily use qualitative methods to explore the motivations behind my respondents' activism. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews of 53 female British Muslim gender-justice activists and 43 female American Muslim gender-justice activists. Because I am interested in a self-selected population of activists, I found my respondents through a combination of snowball sampling (with a quota placed on the number of references each activist could provide me) and organizational research. In both the UK and US, the majority of my respondents were in their 20s or 30s, well-educated, urban, and either in school or employed full time. Recognizing the importance of class or 'cultural' arguments that could correlate with certain ethnic backgrounds, I made great efforts to diversify respondents according to class and ethnic origin: roughly 40% of my British respondents were from working-class backgrounds (with the rest self-identifying as middle-class), while only 15% of my American respondents reported a working-class background; and ethnic origin ranged from South Asian, Middle Eastern, North African and Caribbean descent in the UK to South Asian, Middle Eastern, North African and African-American descent in the US). It is important to note that while different class backgrounds and countries of origin add variation to my comparison, I do not observe any substantial variation along either lines in interviews with my respondents (this will be addressed in detail in subsequent chapters). Interviews lasted, on average, for close to 90 minutes and efforts have been made in reporting results to protect the anonymity of the majority of respondents—at their request—unless I have special permission from a respondent to use her name or describe her work in such a way that she may be easily identified.

Chapter two also required media content analysis to: a) investigate the veracity of activists' claims that the media misrepresents the Muslim woman as a submissive, oppressed figure to the wider public, and b) demonstrate how activists create alternative media outlets to depict the Muslim woman as a normalized citizen, if not stronger and more independent than the average woman. I use the Yoshikoder content analysis program to determine the tone of media items (Lowe 2006). This program codes articles as positive or negative, according to a General Inquirer (GI) dictionary of positive and negative terms in the English language, which is also supplemented by a customized dictionary that I created of positive and negative terms directly pertaining to the Muslim identity. This methodology is explained in detail in the next chapter.

II. MULTICULTURALISM

The most prominent advocate of multiculturalist theory is William Kymlicka, who makes the case that multiculturalism and liberalism are not only compatible, but complementary to each other's successful implementation. First, some of the individual rights that liberalism underlines, such as freedom of speech and association, are in fact very important for protecting group difference; these rights allow people to form associations and represent their views to broader society (Kymlicka 1996). Second, individual behavior that differs from majority norms is best understood through differences in group contexts—in other words, individuals' participation or membership in groups that in turn shape 'societal cultures.' Kymlicka believes that societal cultures form a *context of choice* that "provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres" (Kymlicka 1996: 76). Seen as a heuristic mechanism for immigrant behavior,

culture becomes instrumental in the state's power relations with immigrants: legal mechanisms employ cultural identities as a defense in civil and criminal conflicts, certain public policy initiatives aim to cater to group-based needs, etc.

Kymlicka distinguishes between national minorities (e.g. Puerto Ricans or Native Americans in the US) that preceded immigration and immigrant minorities, though it is clear that both types of minorities have non-majority backgrounds or came from environments that might explain why their interests differ from those of the white, Anglo-majority in Britain or the US. In the case of immigrants, Kymlicka focuses almost exclusively on the context constructed for *first generation* immigrants by their sending countries' customs and traditions. The children of first generation immigrants (called second generation immigrants themselves) are almost absent in this analysis, which leaves us questioning whether they are expected to draw on the context of choice from their parents' sending countries or from the liberal multicultural state in which they are born and raised. Before moving on to the ways in which second generation women are speaking up and trying to reinsert themselves into the multicultural debate, it is necessary to review how multiculturalism is pursued as a political project in both Britain and the US, in order to understand how the Muslim political identity developed in each state.

Scholars who advocate for multicultural state models generally agree that its main virtue lies in preventing the tyranny of majority norms from subjugating minority interests (Renteln 2005; Parekh 2002; Glazer 1998; Kymlicka 1996). Though these conflicts in interests often come to fruition through ordinary lifestyle decisions such as dress codes and dietary restrictions, they actually represent a much more symbolic move by the state to observe and honor minority difference in a democratic society. A truly democratic society, scholars of multiculturalism argue, would acknowledge the cultural contexts that majority and minority individuals use to inform

their own behavior.

Scholars who argue against multiculturalism also converge around a common concern—namely, that the prioritization of respecting difference might undermine the political project of unity on which the survival of any modern nation state ultimately relies (Huntington 1998; Fish 1997). Stanley Fish, in particular, argues that multiculturalism's 'first principle' of tolerance is impractical because "sooner or later the culture whose core values you are tolerating will reveal itself to be intolerant at that same core" (Fish 1997: 3). According to Fish, tolerance for tolerance's sake leads to what he terms 'boutique multiculturalism' and he argues that such multiculturalists are only conveniently interested in diversity up until the point at which it conflicts with their own convictions. He argues that a sincere 'politics of difference' would not only encompass polite interest in minority cultures, but that it would also allow group-based exemptions to the (majority) legal order.

Such legal pluralism often resides at the center of critics' concerns over the ability of multicultural societies to maintain order. In both Britain and the US, a legal mechanism called the cultural defense exists in courts to mitigate the sentencing of individuals whose criminal behavior is deemed to conform to their minority culture. Advocates for this defense argue that cultural conditioning predisposes people to act in certain ways and cultural evidence must be admitted into the courtroom to at least explain the defendant's motivations and cognitive framework (Renteln 2005). Those who oppose this legal mechanism largely do so on the basis that it essentializes minority cultures, by portraying cultures as stagnant identities that program individual behavior. Domestic violence, for example, is argued in cultural defense cases as expected or predictable in 'Other' minority cultures, while ignoring the prevalence of similar violence in Western states' majority cultures as well (Song 2005). The criticism concerning this legal mechanism echoes a general criticism of

multiculturalism: in acknowledging diversity, difference must be reified. These detractors do not necessarily oppose the political project of multiculturalism that looks to respect diversity, but they disagree with the ways in which it can lead to exclusive cultural group classifications. In the following sections, I address the ways in which multiculturalism emerged in both Britain and the US against different historical backdrops and subsequently gave birth to each state's distinct Muslim identity.

A. Multiculturalism in Britain

Britain experienced a swell in immigration after it granted independence to a large number of its colonies after World War II. Immigrants were mostly South Asian and Caribbean men, initially settling as temporary economic migrants to fill labor shortages in the former colonial power. It soon became apparent, however, that migrants wanted to settle permanently in Britain and sent for wives and families to join them under a voucher system that was used for family reunification purposes. In response to growing public sentiment against immigration, the Conservative government turned towards restrictionism in 1962 and began to strictly regulate immigration, effectively stopping Commonwealth immigration by imposing requirements on new immigrants that demanded British ancestry and lineage (Hansen 2000).

In the 1970s and 1980s, a political movement emerged among minorities organized around anti-racist principles, partly in reaction to anti-immigrant and anti-racial minority public sentiment, but also largely inspired by similar anti-racist ideology in the American Civil Rights movement from the 1960s (Modood 2009). In Britain this movement opened up the question of race by calling all people who were considered victims of color racism 'black' in a motion towards solidarity, deliberately blurring lines between different ethnic and racial groups.

This movement put multicultural demands on the table, pointing out that minorities needed policies that addressed racial and ethnic group-specific interests to counter the disproportionate deprivation minority communities experienced. The movement fought for social welfare policies in housing and employment, such as low-income accommodations and anti-discrimination legislation. The Race Relations Act of 1976 outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, nationality, ethnic and national origin in education, employment, and social services; the act notably failed to include religious identification, which would only be addressed in 2006 by the Racial and Religious Hatred Act that outlawed inciting hatred against a person on the basis of their religious identity. As will be discussed below, the exclusion of religious identification did not go unnoticed by Muslims in the anti-racist movement, who felt they received no support from fellow racial minorities when discrimination was based on the grounds of their religion.

Multicultural policies also allowed anti-racist education at the local level, which focused on teaching children to combat racism in the educational system and society at large. These demands emerged formally in response to the perceived racism of immigrant education in the 1960s, and criticized British multicultural education efforts for focusing on diversity and pluralism at the expense of equality and justice. Instead of concentrating on diverse admissions or pluralist subject matter, for example, as American multicultural efforts advocated (discussed below), the anti-racist movement wanted students to learn about the oppression to which the British majority subjected British minorities. Yet, today multicultural education scholars are increasingly arguing that these two educational approaches should be offered hand in hand (Gillborn 2005; Figueroa 2004,1999).

B. Multiculturalism in the United States

The United States does not have any clearly established multicultural policies at the federal level, but multiculturalism emerged as a political project in the latter half of the twentieth century. Multiculturalism in the US traces back to two key national moments in the 1960s: 1) the Civil Rights movement, and 2) the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that abolished national origin formulas and resulted in a rise of immigration from non-European countries. Kymlicka's version of multiculturalism that addresses incorporating the diversity brought about by two distinct groups—national minorities and immigrant minorities—effectively describes multiculturalism in the US.

The Civil Rights Movement, and the racial tension leading up to the movement itself, highlighted the fact that national minorities—the African-American population, in particular—were excluded from the narrative of US history. Though religious groups such as Jews and Catholics were at the middle of battles over integrated schooling (Zeit 2007) and ethnic groups such as the Japanese were isolated during post World War II internment (Hayashi 2004), racial groups have borne the brunt of discrimination in the US. The experiences of racial minorities were kept separate from the mainstream American narrative and African-American history was either overlooked or taught in parallel to the rest of US history.

While racial tension was at its peak, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 passed, resulting in an influx of immigrants from (mostly Asian) non-European countries and substantially changing the ethnic make-up of the US. While the rest of the country was contemplating the concept of diversity, a completely new group of immigrant minorities flooded the country. It soon became clear that the old 'melting pot' image that the Anglo conformity model of immigration had encouraged could not

be sustained with more and more demands being made to respect group difference and diversity.

The creation of Ethnic Studies departments in universities and colleges was an important result of the CRM and the change in the country's ethnic make-up due to immigration. Though the US does not technically have any federal multicultural policy, the multicultural political project is most evident in the education system. While the country's federalist system delegates ultimate discretion over curriculum to the state-level, which should caution any theorist against making generalizing claims about 'US education' (with recent 2010 controversies over textbooks in Texas and Ethnic Studies in Arizona only underling this warning⁵), the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a spike in Ethnic Studies departments across the country (Hu-DeHart 1993). These departments not only advocated the importance of teaching about diverse group's contributions to US and world history, but also contributed towards recruitment and admissions efforts for minority students.

Despite the recent controversies across much of the country over immigration policy and the continuation of Ethnic Studies, by 1997 the widespread acceptance of multiculturalism's educational effect led a scholar of multiculturalism, Nathan Glazer, to proclaim, "we are all multiculturalists now." There were still state, county and individual school battles over curriculum requirements and teaching policy, but Glazer argued that, for the most part, "The American public school, originally established to

⁵ See media coverage of the Texas textbook controversy: McKinley, James. March 12, 2010. "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Change" *The New York Times*: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html>; Brick, Michael. May 20, 2010. "Texas School Board Set to Vote Textbook Revisions" *The New York Times*: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/21/education/21textbooks.html>; See media coverage of Arizona Ethnic Studies Program controversy: Santa Cruz, Nicole. May 12, 2010. "Arizona Bill targeting ethnic studies signed into law" *The LA Times*: <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/may/12/nation/la-na-ethnic-studies-20100512>.

mold Americans of all backgrounds into a common culture... has undergone a remarkable change in the last twenty years” (Glazer 1997: 7). The central demand at the heart of multiculturalism for the respect of diversity manifested outside of education as well—such as the interpretation of freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and exemptions from legal restrictions—but education has remained the primary focus of the American multicultural project because of the epistemic value of teaching diversity in classrooms. My research investigates the role that the Muslim community plays in both countries’ multicultural political projects and how this might impact women members of each community.

III. CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE(S)

This dissertation places itself at the crossroads of three different literatures: social movement politics, gender politics and immigration politics. My research contributes to the literature on identity politics (social movements politics) by discussing the construction of the Muslim identity in the multicultural political project. I also engage with Muslim and non-Muslim feminist critiques of multiculturalism (gender politics) to highlight the androcentrism of the identity construction that uses the Muslim male as the point of reference. Lastly, I illustrate that the second generation identity is undertheorized in the immigration literature (immigration politics), which applies a primocentric perspective and uses the first generation immigrant as a point of reference. The second generation is rarely given agency, as theories predict they will either retain the primocentric version of their cultural identity, passed down by their parents, or assimilate into the mainstream society by abandoning the cultural identity. Instead, I argue that activists among second generation Muslim women in both countries formulate distinct Muslim identities from their first generation parents.

A. Political Identity Construction

In order for the multicultural project in either country to manage the needs of its Muslim population, it is critical to establish what comprises this particular political identity. As Satya Mohanty (2003) explains, identity is at the heart of multicultural politics: “If multiculturalism is to be the goal of educational and political institutions, we need a workable notion of how a social group is unified by a common culture, as well as the ability to identify genuine cultural differences (and similarities) across groups” (Mohanty 2003: 392). Moreover, if discrimination occurs on the basis of social groups, such as racial, ethnic or religious affiliations, then we must understand how to define such groups in order to either stop this discrimination or actively advance them past the obstacles that historical discrimination has put in their path.

As social movement scholars will argue, a primary stage to mobilization involves the construction of political identities behind which people organize. Charles Tilly explained that “identities are social arrangements...in which people construct shared stories about who they are, how they are connected, and what has happened to them... Identities become *political* identities when governments become parties to them” (Tilly 2003: 608-09). In this sense, the Muslim political identity that the government considers in its creation of multicultural policies is indeed a political identity that explains the collective Muslim experience; clarifying this identity serves the purpose of establishing individuals’ positions in society and their status in relation to members claiming non-Muslim identities.

The main debate in the identity politics literature emerges between the essentialism of scholars who argue that identities are strong predictors of behavior and the skepticism of postmodern scholars who argue that identities are all unstable constructions that reflect more about their context than any inherent characteristics. The latter group of scholars assumes that systemic, social forces such as capitalism or

patriarchy powerfully trump the primordial inclinations that the former group of scholars assumes. Instead, postmodernists argue that the construction of an identity should reflect the complexity of context and just how differently individuals interact with their environment. Mohanty explains: “Our identities are ways of making sense of our experiences. Identities are theoretical constructions that enable us to read the world in specific ways. It is in this sense that they are valuable, and their epistemic status should be taken very seriously. In them, and through them, we learn to define and reshape our values and our commitments, we give texture and form to our collective futures” (Mohanty 2003: 398). Identities are manifestations of how individuals perceive not only their surroundings, but also their relative position in a social hierarchy that organizes identities in relation to one another.

This suggests that any examination of the Muslim identity in both Britain and the US should likewise consider each country’s historical context and how it has influenced this identity’s construction. In both Britain and the US, the Muslim population is comprised of various ethnic groups. As mentioned briefly above, the majority of Britain’s Muslims come from South Asia (43% Pakistan; 17% Bangladesh), though there are also Muslims from the Afro-Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and converts from the British population. America’s Muslims are more evenly derived from three major groups: South Asians, Arabs and African-Americans. American estimates are controversial, with one breakdown estimating ‘Americans’ at 30%, South Asians 29% and Arabs at 33% (Leonard 2005).⁶ While the convert and African-American populations have mobilized behind a Muslim identity in significant ways, particularly through the Nation of Islam and its associated historical context, this dissertation focuses on immigrant Muslim populations because this allows a

⁶ See Fareed H. Nu’man, (1999). *The Muslim Population in the United States*. New York: CAMRI.

comparison between the British and American contexts. Though the ‘minority’ label has played a large part in constructing the non-immigrant, black Muslim population in the US, I use ‘minority Muslim identity’ in this dissertation to describe the first and second generation immigrant Muslim populations in both countries. I use this particular term in order to express their demographic minority status, in addition to addressing the racialization of the Muslim identity.

This minority Muslim identity emerged in both Britain and the US in the late 1980s as a group to be incorporated into each country’s multicultural political project. As the next two sections will demonstrate, each country’s distinct historical context gave rise to quite different Muslim identities—in Britain, Muslims comprise a disproportionately disadvantaged socio-economic group, while immigrant Muslims in America largely mirror the mainstream population in rates of education and employment. In addition to different historical contexts, and perhaps as a result of them, each state has also forged a distinct relationship with its Muslim population in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in 2001 in America and 2005 in Britain.

Yet, as subsequent sections will explain, despite these differences between overall Muslim populations, a subset of second generation Muslim women in *both countries* are engaged in a project to construct a new Muslim identity that considers the intersection of their religious identity with their gender and generational identities. Intersectionality theory advocates just such a cross-sectional analysis of multiple identities and their associated oppressions, but whereas intersectional scholarship has focused on how the gender identity intersects with race, class and more recently ethnicity, nationality and sexual orientation, it still has yet to seriously consider religious or generational identities (Stabile 2008; Pintchman 2000).

Nonetheless, the logic applied by intersectionality theory directly relates to Muslim women in the West. Kimberle Crenshaw, the preeminent scholar of

intersectionality, argues that reducing women's experience to a single axis of oppression loses sight of the multidimensional nature of women's identities: "Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens, in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination" (Crenshaw 1989: 139). By replacing the hypothetical woman's racial identity with a religious or generational identity, it is clear that Crenshaw's analysis would apply to second generation Muslim women as well. Before moving on to a discussion of how activists promote a new Muslim identity to counter the current understanding of the Muslim identity in the West, the following sections explain just how this androcentric, primocentric identity was constructed in each country, due to different historical contexts of immigration and race relations.

1) Muslims in Britain

In the late 1980s, the public outcry in the Muslim world over the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* introduced the religious Muslim identity into Britain's identity politics, which had until then had focused on racial and ethnic identities. Rushdie's book was considered blasphemous because it described fictional religious phrases that were in direct contradiction to Qur'anic principles. The book was also controversial because it was deemed by some to have defamed the Prophet Muhammad by giving prostitutes the names of the Prophet's wives. While many British Muslims did not agree with the fatwa issued by Iranian clerical leader Ayatollah Khomeini on Rushdie and did not take part in protests calling for the book

to be burned or banned, some did indeed mobilize in defense of their religious community and take to the streets in riotous demonstrations against the novel.

British Muslim leaders pointed out that the British state upheld a law against blasphemy that covered blaspheme against the Church of England and argued that allowing blaspheme against Islam revealed the state's anti-Islam bias. Muslim leaders even petitioned the state to extend the laws of blasphemy to other religions, but the judgement of the court in *R. v. Chief Metropolitan Stipendiary Magistrate, ex parte Choudhury* (1990) ruled that such an extension "would be virtually impossible by judicial decision to set sufficiently clear limits to the offence... would pose insuperable problems and would be likely to do more harm than good."⁷ The law remained limited to protect religious offense against the Church of England and any challenge to its discriminatory nature towards other religions was met with arguments of impracticality and claims that extending such a law to other religions would encourage an atmosphere of censorship and intolerance instead of one that protected the freedom of expression. Chapter five will discuss the British state's evolving position towards the law against blasphemy and its eventual abolishment in 2008 in more detail, but it is important to note at this point in my analysis that Muslims felt alienated by the state's continuous refusal to protect the Muslim community against religious offence—a protection that they felt was otherwise written into law for British Christians.⁸

⁷ See "Extending law on blasphemy would likely do more harm than good." *The Times*. April 10, 1990.

⁸ The blasphemy law was actually limited to the followers of the Church of England only, which also meant that it technically discriminated against other denominations in Christianity as well (e.g. Catholics, Methodists, etc.). The House of Lords produced a report on religious offences in England Wales in 2003 after being asked to reassess the state's blasphemy law and whether it could be expanded to other religions. It argued, similarly to the court in *R. v. Chief Metropolitan Stipendiary Magistrate, ex parte Choudhury* (1990), that to extend the law would be impossibly difficult, put undue strain on the freedom of expression, and should remain limited to offenses against the

Muslim activists also felt abandoned by a similar double standard in the anti-racist movement that fought against discrimination on racial or ethnic grounds, but refrained from extending the same logic to religious offence. Tariq Modood (2006) argues that the movement's lack of support for Muslims during the Rusdhi affair formed a definitive moment in British race relations. This episode marked the first time that some Muslim activists felt clearly abandoned by all other non-white minorities, though the entire purpose behind the political blackness movement was to define the civility and respect that is appropriate in a multicultural society, or to the "political constitution of difference in Britain" (Modood 2006: 42). From this point onwards, Muslims who had been active in the anti-racist movement began drawing attention to Muslim group needs that differed from 'Asian' or 'black' needs. For instance, they highlighted housing provisions provided state-subsidized accommodations for Asians, yet did not allow Muslim Asians in interethnic marriages with non-Asian Muslims to move there with their own partners.⁹ Muslims who had not been active before and had even considered themselves 'lapsed Muslims' found a new sense of community solidarity and joined veteran Muslim activists behind the British Muslim identity (Modood 2006).

The main differences between the British and American Muslim populations stem from dissimilar colonial legacies and settlement histories. The vast majority of British Muslims come from Pakistan and Bangladesh. Most Pakistani migrants were poor economic migrants in the early 1960s and hailed from Northern Punjab and the rural Mirpur district of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, after the town was destroyed by the

Church of England. See: House of Lords, "Religious Offences in England and Wales—First Report" Session 2002-2003, 10 April 2003. <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/ld200203/ldselect/ldrelot/95/9501.htm>.

⁹ See author's interview with a lead activist with the An-nisa Society, cited in chapter 3, discussing housing association and council estate provisions.

Mangla Dam's waters.¹⁰ Some Bangladeshi migrants also came as economic migrants because of economic hardships in East Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s, but a large wave of Sylhetis migrated during the War for Independence in 1971 to escape political instability.¹¹

These settlement histories have led to poor reception in the new host society, and British Muslims' socio-economic status remains low with high rates of unemployment and low rates of educational attainment. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis comprise the poorest two groups in the country, with their male unemployment rates hovering at above 10 percentage points above the average population. Despite controlling for education and residential area, Muslim men are still much more likely to be unemployed than white men, and even Indian Muslim men fare worse than Indian Hindus. In education, Muslim children are also falling behind in performance rates, experiencing a decline in achievement while Afro-Caribbean and Indian pupils have fared better than Muslims over the past few years.¹²

I argue that the British state has tackled this recently constructed Muslim political identity with a system of *religious corporatism*, an approach theorized by Jonathan Laurence (2009) regarding countries on the European continent. Corporatism, based on the Latin word *corpus* meaning body, is broadly understood as a system that treats community as a body—certain groups and individuals have distinct roles, but belong to the same federation. This idea developed as a government strategy in the 1880s and 1890s to mitigate the rise of potentially violent underrepresented groups who threatened the peace and stability of democratic

¹⁰ cite Communities and Local Government Report: "The Pakistani Muslim Community in England" 2009

¹¹ cite Communities and Local Government Report: "The Bangladeshi Muslim Community in England" 2009.

¹² See Muslim Council of Britain, Statistics on "Disadvantage, Poverty, Unemployment" <http://www.mcb.org.uk/library/statistics.php#4>.

consolidation. In order to mitigate this threat, the government pursues broad institutional engagement with ‘moderates’ from minority groups to help diffuse conflict. Religious corporatism, then, is the same strategy employed in religiously plural countries where domestic religious extremism is the considered threat.

Laurence examines contemporary State-Islam relations across Europe and argues that a system of religious corporatism creates Islamic Councils to advise Western governments on “pragmatic applications of Islam,” (e.g. appointing chaplains in prison, halal certifications, religious education in schools, etc.). While Laurence initial argument proposes that seven European countries, excluding England, have formed official Councils, I argue that the same form of religious corporatism has existed in Britain since a coherent Muslim identity emerged after the Rushdie affair in the 1980s.¹³ Not only are local religious leaders consulted on mandatory Religious Education (RE) requirements, but mainstream Muslim organizations such as the Muslim Council of Britain also serve as the ‘moderates’ that attempt to represent the British Muslim community. The formation of unofficial Islamic advisory groups may emerge as a direct response to the contemporary threat posed by a rising Muslim identity, but the corporatist approach is historically grounded in Britain’s approach to religion. The historical role of religion in Britain and how it gave rise to this system of religious corporatism will be addressed in detail in chapter five.

At the turn of this decade, the British state shifted towards what it called ‘community cohesion’ efforts. In 2004, in the wake of the March bombings in Madrid and the discovery of an arsenal of explosives in London, the government launched an ambitious project that aimed at winning “the hearts and minds” of Muslim youth. Confidential documents leaked to *The Sunday Times* described the government’s

¹³ Laurence has a forthcoming (2010) analysis on Islamic Councils across Europe that includes England. This forthcoming work is discussed in detail in chapter five.

concern regarding ‘homegrown terrorism,’ particularly from disaffected, well-educated Muslim male youth. In the leaked documents, government officials argued: “We need to find ways of strengthening the hand of moderate Muslim leaders, including the young Muslims with future leadership potential, through the status which contact with the government can confer, and through practical capacity building measures.”¹⁴ This relationship between the state and moderate Muslim leaders is precisely one that a religious corporatist system would endorse.

The documents went on to identify specific (male) leaders it had in mind--one of these being Amr Khaled, an Egyptian accountant-turned-lay-preacher who came to prominence in Egypt in the late 1990s and now lives in Britain. Khaled has a large following, especially among youth, for applying a modern face to Islam; he uses television and modern media to preach his messages, appears clean-shaven, dresses in modern attire, and speaks in accessible language. However, Lindsay Wise’s (2006) examination of Khaled’s influence on youth reveals that he is not trained in Islamic scholarship and preaches messages that are deemed moderate to those preoccupied by Muslim stereotypes, but are really conservative on women’s rights. For example, he moralizes that women should wear *hijab*.¹⁵ Yet, when the topic of religious dress was broached in my interviews (see chapter two), the vast majority of my respondents believed that dressing modestly was the only Islamic requirement and that the *hijab* was *one option*, a personal choice that each woman must make for herself. By endorsing the position of quasi-clerics such as Khaled, who publicly take conservative positions on women’s rights, the British government effectively sides with male leadership against the dissenting views of my gender-justice activist respondents.

¹⁴

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article436135.ece?token=null&offset=0&page=1>

¹⁵ <http://www.tbsjournal.com/wise.htm>

In 2005, the government approach intensified in response to the July 7 London bombings, which, as they had feared, were carried out by British Muslim youth. Initially, the government set up The Preventing Extremism Together taskforce, which brought together a rather wide cross-section of Muslim community representatives to make recommendations for government policy. The taskforce produced a report in November 2005 that argued the key solution to tackling extremism was to first address a series of issues that disproportionately affected the Muslim community in Britain, such as inequality, discrimination, and deprivation (Kundnani 2009).

But in April 2007, the government launched its official *Prevent* program, with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), which effectively ignored the recommendations made by the taskforce to address systemic problems plaguing the Muslim community. Instead the taskforce opted for a four-pronged agenda: 1) to *pursue* terrorists, 2) to *protect* infrastructure, 3) to *prepare* emergency response services, and 4) to *prevent* people from becoming terrorists. The community cohesion efforts were part of the fourth portion of the agenda; in order to prevent extremism, the government reasoned that “communities stop terrorism.” The responsibility for solving problems in the Muslim community was shifted to Muslims themselves and the government increased the call for Muslims to integrate into broader British society. The Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund was set up so that the DCLG could delegate funds to local Muslim organizations who pledged to work towards these goals.¹⁶ I argue in chapter five that this state policy might have

¹⁶ See “Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund: Guidance Note for Government Office and Local Authorities in England,” Department for Communities and Local Government, February 2007. http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:hZg-ju4uKjsJ:www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/320330.pdf+Preventing+Violent+Extremism+Pathfinder+Fund+funds+to+local+muslim+organization&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEEShyfxI3fEHMIAhjz_8rNUtu6vLDgG4XN3nrm6n

had state security in mind, but caused unintended consequences in the Muslim immigrant community. I examine how the state brokered relationships with male first generation Muslim leaders, inadvertently strengthening the leaders' authoritative powers in the community and marginalizing dissenting voices that did not agree with their androcentric, primocentric definition of how the Muslim identity should be understood in the West.

2) Muslims in the United States

As a minority religious group in America that is also predominantly non-white, Muslims find themselves in a strange position between their marginalized racial position and their venerated religious position. The latter position comes from the popular image of the American republic as the defender of religious freedom. Muslim studies scholars point out, however, that just as 'universal rights' in the America's foundational texts were selectively applied to whites, rights to religious freedom have also not been uniformly applied (Haddad and Ricks 2009). Despite the broad wording of the 'free exercise' and 'establishment' clauses of the US Constitution that pledged that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (U.S. CONST, amend. 1), the same scholars argue that the country's foundation was a "de facto 'establishment' of Protestantism" (Haddad and Ricks 2009: 16). The almost schizophrenic image of America as a secular, yet religious, country was based on a white and Protestant impression of what it meant to 'be American,' similar to the Anglo conformity model that was applied to immigration prior to the 1960s.

[nHH4OZOtEj6MUzuFULIUnVwkvaTk2QQ5XGsusiQfnenhvHrKxGTe7jTDBe-0fZcdQGQoi-tRHqmK0KU5RBARAsMTsUM2DnIdZ&sig=AHIEtbRT3TyP0zgPVYDtL1fgqPm1ZefycQ.](https://doi.org/10.1080/00141801.2014.941111)

Nonetheless, it could be argued that the elevated role of religion in American society paved the way for Muslim immigrants to establish themselves in mainstream organizations and institutions. They appreciated the voluntary, yet pervasive function religion played in the US and built mosques that modeled after churches, not only operating as places of worship, but also as community centers for new immigrants' families. American Muslim immigrants were also primarily well-off, with more education and resources than the vast majority of their British counterparts. The community's ability to relate to America's religious fervor and their relatively comfortable economic standing, combined with the increasing popularity of Islam among African-American converts, helps construct the Muslim identity as just another example of diversity in America's multicultural project.

In contrast to Britain's Muslim population, Muslim Americans have fared well socio-economically. Recent polling by the Pew Research Center reports that American Muslims are doing reasonably well financially, with immigrant Muslims reporting more financial satisfaction than native born Muslims (i.e. black converts). Education levels are also said to mirror percentages in the general public, with 24% of Muslims reporting a college degree and 22% enrolled in college classes.¹⁷

This success has largely to do with the different settlement histories of American Muslims. As opposed to their British counterparts' immigration patterns from rural, impoverished regions in South Asia, immigrant American Muslims are divided between Arab (24%) and South Asian (18%) countries with a significant percentage (20%) of African-American native born Muslims as well.¹⁸ The reasons for migration are also just as varied, with respondents reporting educational opportunities (26%), economic opportunities (24%), family reasons (24%), and

¹⁷ See Pew Research Center Poll

¹⁸ cite Pew report: "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream"

conflict or persecution in the sending country (20%). The different settlement histories and lack of post-colonial migration in the US has created an arguably strong ‘middle class, mainstream’ American Muslim community (Pew Research).

As in Britain, it was not until the Rushdie affair that the Muslim minority identity came into focus in the US. Haddad and Ricks (2009) argue that American Muslims reacted to the episode with discomfort, because they felt for the first time that they did not enjoy the same protection from religious offense or defamation as their fellow racial, ethnic and religious minorities, particularly blacks and Jews. However, unlike the British Muslim experience, no American Muslims protested, burned the novel publicly, or rioted violently in the streets. This serves as an important indication of the different relationship that British and American Muslims have with their respective states. On one hand, British Muslims felt frustrated by the state’s failure to administer welfare benefits to their disproportionately needy community and saw the Rushdie affair as adding insult to injury. American Muslims, on the other hand, had little socio-economic frustration to tap into to mobilize in response to the literary episode.

A host of subsequent political developments that rapidly followed, however, only increased the alienation that American Muslims felt at the hands of the US government. For instance, the first Gulf War and attacks committed by Muslims on the World Trade Center and US interests abroad in the 1990s further underscored the ‘Islamic’ threat to US security. These episodes prompted Muslims to question whether they were considered part of the American polity, or an external threat to its well-being. Finally, the attacks of September 11, 2001, perpetrated by foreign-born Muslim men, served as a tipping point for the state’s security concerns with Muslims at large. While ensuing domestic legislation such as the USA PATRIOT Act clamped

down on Muslims' civil liberties, media coverage of these attacks effectively encouraged the normalization of Islamophobia in the public sentiment as well. Though there were notable gestures of kindness from non-Muslims around the country who felt that the American Muslim community was being scapegoated, and a more widespread sense of curiosity emerged about Islam after the attacks, American Muslims felt as though the Muslim identity faced different challenges than their fellow race, ethnicity, and even religious groups had thus far confronted within the country's multicultural project (Muedini 2009; Maira 2008). A majority (53%) of American Muslims reported believing it was more difficult to be Muslim in the US after September 11, 2001, with 19% reporting discrimination, 15% reporting being viewed as a terrorist, and 14% reporting ignorance about Islam as the most important problems they encounter.¹⁹

As opposed to the system of religious corporatism that Britain implements to engage Muslim identity, the US mainly avoids brokering such power relationships with specific domestic Muslim leaders. In part, this may be due to the different constructions of threat that were generated by each country's attack—the conflict in Britain was dubbed 'homegrown terrorism,' while the threat to the US was largely framed as a foreign threat perpetrated by non-American Muslims. Though there have been recent isolated cases of American Muslims attempting acts of violence, the concern still seems to largely focus on threats coming from abroad. The few incidents

¹⁹ See Pew Research Center Poll. 2007. "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream":

http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:z02uKBXj1OEJ:pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf+pew+muslims+and+mainstream&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESgNHTesnwNfo_KO_FwUDrZ-IAAqBif44Ei0fE5-oZ2FUOfkM_iVXU8KHGSuv-NfWeRt63ZQWw4u5spaQDcs5IgeErOA4SS9L0ILujo_ANQGJuQEDBJ1G8WkX4Rn18GMctFH7iH6d&sig=AHIEtbQNr93uTOkQFNYxqOPe5XCcVw0aLw

that have been perpetrated by American-born or naturalized Muslims have all been framed by the government and media as “lone-wolf” occurrences;²⁰ the attacks are effectively conflated with other acts of terror that have been executed by non-Muslim fanatics, instead of representing organized American Muslim efforts against the state. However, in chapter five, I interrogate the relationship between the state and religion and conclude that this set of institutional arrangements can be traced back to religion’s historical role in each country.

B. *Gendered Identity Politics*

The most vocal censure of multiculturalism is generated by its feminist critics, who argue that the project *androcentrically* uses minority males as a point of reference. Susan Moller Okin is most famous amongst them, writing a well-known essay entitled “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” that questions whether allowing cultural groups to hold onto traditions from their homelands perpetuates patriarchal practices, effectively holding minority women’s rights to a lower standard than their majority counterparts. Okin argues that multiculturalist theories do not include enough safeguards for women’s rights within minority groups, and specifically targets Islam by citing cases of polygamy and female genital mutilation as illustrations of culturally endorsed practices that oppress minority women.

Okin acknowledges that most multiculturalism theorists argue that minority groups must govern themselves according to liberal principles, meaning they ought not discriminate among members based on sex, race or sexual preference. Yet, when

²⁰ See Senator Charles Schumer’s description of the 2010 Times Square bombing: <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2010/05/02/bomb-suspect-likely-a-lone-wolf-says-schumer/>; See the media’s description of the 2009 Fort Hood shooting: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brian-levin-jd/the-ft-hood-massacre-a-lo_b_350242.html; See the media’s description of five young men from Northern Virginia who were caught moving to Pakistan in 2009 to seek training from extremist groups: <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/01/01/a-thousand-points-of-hate.html>.

addressing Kymlicka's confidence in multiculturalism she argues that such expectations are unreasonable in practice: "Far fewer minority cultures than Kymlicka seems to think will be able to claim group rights under his liberal justification" (Okin 1999: 21).

All the same, Okin's feminist censure of multiculturalism has drawn a considerable amount of its own disapproval from minority women themselves, who argue that that she suffers from an androcentric perspective herself. By equating the 'Muslim identity' with poor behavior by Muslim men, Okin is criticized by some Muslim, as well as non-Muslim, scholars and activists as marginalizing Muslim women's experience in articulating their own Muslim identity (al-Hibri 1999; Nussbaum 1999; Sassen 1999). Azizah al-Hibri, an academic expert on Islamic jurisprudence and founder of KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights in the US, responds to Okin's essay in a piece entitled "Is Western Patriarchal Feminism Good for Third World/Minority Women?" She criticizes Okin's ethnocentrism, arguing that Okin ignores those women who feel a strong attachment to their faith, not because they are oppressed, misled or unenlightened, but because they choose to be religious. Okin is thus seen as perpetuating stereotypical views of Islam's position on women's rights, effectively further harming the women she claims to protect by dissolving multicultural practices. Al-Hibri argues that the *real* damage done to women by multiculturalism is felt by minority women who feel that their culture has been hijacked and misrepresented, in deciding what rights and privileges its members deserve as minority members of society (al-Hibri 2000).

Al-Hibri also argues that the implementation of multicultural policies discriminate against women from minority cultures as well. She examines the Islamic marriage contract in American courts and argues that judges have ruled against women's rights in Islamic marriages by accepting the testimony of male, first

generation leaders who offer cultural interpretations of what the marriage contract actually dictates (al-Hibri 2000). In one particular example, al-Hibri explains that a male *imam* translated the term *mahr* as ‘bride price,’ effectively prejudicing the Western judge who refused to enforce the contract’s terms upon the couple in question’s divorce. This *imam*’s translation, however, contradicts Qur’anic text that portrays the *mahr* as a gift from the bridegroom to the bride. Al-Hibri argues that women’s religious rights are denied because “many Muslim men, whether *imams* of mosques or professors of religion, are not sufficiently familiar with Islamic law. Often, they confuse their cultural beliefs and practices with Islam itself” (Al-Hibri 2000). The multicultural provision that considers alternative marriage contracts under third party arbitration laws is seen in this instance as a positive policy that would protect Muslim women’s assets in the case of divorce; it is the way the policies’ implementation relies upon male immigrants’ interpretations of Islam that is deemed unacceptable.

The argument against essentializing the Muslim identity in particular is also employed by Muslim women who are worried that stereotypically associating gender violence with the Islamic faith is not only a misreading of their religion, but also a perspective that obscures the prevalence of gender violence in wider society. For instance, when a Muslim man named Muzzammil Hassan, murdered his wife by decapitation in 2009 in Buffalo, New York, it was immediately dubbed the ‘Buffalo Beheading’ and an ‘honor killing’ by the news media. Interestingly, a similar case from just a week prior to the Hassan case, that involved a male Chinese graduate student decapitating a female Chinese graduate student who did not return his affection, barely received any media coverage; the little coverage that the violent incident did receive did not once inquire whether the violence was related to the

perpetrator's culture or religion.²¹ The Muslim American community immediately condemned the Hassan murder and numerous civic organizations issued press releases disavowing the notion that honor killings have anything at all to do with Islam. Instead, they argued that such violence stemmed from the domestic violence that is in fact an ongoing problem in the Muslim American community, as it is in the wider American community as well.

Nonetheless, news coverage continued to imply that the violent tragedy was inextricably linked with the defendant's Islamic faith. Even feminist leaders such as Marcia Pappas, the State President of the National Organization of Women's New York chapter, called the incident "[an] 'honor killing,' a murder rooted in cultural notions about women's subordination to men." She goes on to ask, "are we now so respectful of the Muslim's religion that we soft-peddle atrocities committed in its name?"²² Pappas' reference to 'overly' respectful behavior is a clear allusion to multiculturalism's commitment to respecting minority cultural norms. A considerable list of Muslim and non-Muslim women's rights leaders were distressed by Pappas' erroneous claim that domestic violence is sanctioned by Islam and wrote an open letter responding to her statement.²³

It should be noted that this case indeed fit all of the criteria that a cultural defense case would require just a decade ago: the defendant was from a minority community, the minority community was stereotypically assumed to use gender

²¹ The author conducted a comprehensive Lexis Nexis search through all major U.S. Newspapers and Wires for all dates available, using the Chinese perpetrator's name (Zhu Haiyang), and collected a list of 20 documents. In comparison, a search for Muzzammil Hassan on the same newspapers and wires, for all available dates, resulted in a list of 173 documents.

²² cite NOW NY State Press Release, February 16, 2009: http://www.nownys.org/pr_2009/pr_021609.html.

²³ See Rashid, Hussein, March 22, 2009. "A distressing statement from NOW-NY," The complete letter is posted online at: <http://www.altmuslimah.com/a/b/gva/2983/>.

violence to retain family honor, and the victim had allegedly enraged the defendant by filing for divorce. In similar cases, defendants had received mitigated sentences for killing their wives out of an ‘induced rage.’ In one of the most-cited cultural defense cases in the United States, Dong-lu Chen, a Chinese immigrant in New York, killed his wife with a claw hammer in 1989 after discovering that she had been having an affair. Based on dubious testimony from a white male anthropologist, the Brooklyn Supreme Court Justice ruled that Chen “was driven to violence by traditional Chinese values about adultery and loss of manhood” and that “Chen was the product of his culture. . . . The culture was never an excuse, but it is something that made him crack more easily.”²⁴ Chen was ultimately found guilty, but of second-degree manslaughter, and only sentenced to five years probation.

Yet, in Hassan’s case, his culture seems to almost operate as a cultural *offense*, where his Muslim identity is used to *indict* him in a court of public opinion that automatically associates Islam with gender violence, rather than *protect* him through a defense. Anne Phillips (2007) argues that cases involving Muslims in both the US and Britain in their post 9/11 and 7/7 societies may be the product of such reverse cultural stereotyping. Whereas just a decade ago, Hassan might have used the cultural defense to justify his homicidal blind rage, today’s political climate is quick to demonize the Islamic faith in the name of protecting the same minority women it would have severely neglected before the terrorist attacks.

The fact remains, however, that Muslim women are excluded from deciding how the Muslim identity will be defined, represented and, ultimately, treated in such multicultural systems. They do not reject the multicultural political project itself—in fact, they appreciate multicultural provisions that allow them to retain religious

²⁴ See Coleman (2001).

practices that deviate from majority norms, but they resent what they see as a profound analytical lapse that occludes gender within the institutionalization of American multicultural policies. Neither country's Muslim women want the British or American state to endorse a Muslim identity that exclusively represents Muslim men's interests. Accordingly, Muslim women attempt to reclaim their religion by wresting the reigns of representation and interpretation away from male leaders in their communities.

C. Generational Identity Politics

While multiculturalism arguably uses the minority male as a point of reference in its androcentric acknowledgment of cultural identities, it is also important to note that its *primocentricism* leads it to use the *first generation* male experience in particular. As a result, the second generation children of Muslim immigrants in both countries feel marginalized by state politics that claim to respect diversity, yet only seem to recognize diversity comprised of first generation migrants to the host culture. The second generation is at an impossible crossroads in multicultural politics. These individuals racially and ethnically resemble their parents' diversity, yet they are born and raised in the host culture, which tempers conflicting socialization that their parents might have experienced abroad. Moreover, they find that their parents' Muslim identity is often conflated with their national-origin ethnicity under Western multicultural politics, whereas the second generation is engaged in a project to re-imagine a new Muslim identity that is divorced from these ethnic adaptations—the British Muslim identity and the American Muslim identity, instead of the British Pakistani Muslim identity or the American Jordanian Muslim identity.

Until recently the political behavior of the children of immigrants has been undertheorized. If immigration scholarship does address this generation, it is usually embedded in a discussion of assimilation. Classic assimilation theorists assume that

each subsequent generation moves further away from the ethnic enclave and moves a step closer to more complete assimilation (Warner and Srole 1945; Gans 1973; Sandberg 1973). The 'straight-line assimilation model' argued that ethnic groups were temporary classifications and would eventually dissolve over time as subsequent generations learned that upward social mobility relied upon assimilation to the mainstream society.

Gans himself rethought the classic straight-line model in the 1990s and suggested the new post WWII second generation might actually be in danger of faring worse than their immigrant parents. He suggested that assimilation associated with upward mobility might have only been realistically possible for white ethnics and the new immigrants' children faced racism and discrimination. Moreover, he argued that second generation children were not likely to accept work for immigrant wages and would be caught in "second generation decline."

Around the same time, Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1992; 1993) introduced their "segmented assimilation" theory, arguing that second generation individuals could follow one of three paths: 1) consonant acculturation, 2) dissonant acculturation, and 3) selective acculturation. *Consonant acculturation* is a process of upward assimilation, where second generation immigrants acculturate into the dominant, mainstream path and succeed. *Dissonant acculturation*, in contrast, occurs when the second generation acculturates into the social and economic underclass and becomes trapped in its poverty. Finally, *selective acculturation* leads to economic upward mobility, and occurs when children partially assimilate into the mainstream (e.g. enough to do well in school), yet retrain certain aspects of their culture of origin. Segmented assimilation theory, in essence, compromised between the classic straight-line model of assimilation and Gans' remodeled version by arguing that the second generation individual's journey down one of these three paths was influenced by a

combination of parental human capital, modes of incorporation, and family structure—neither second generation success nor decline were categorically inevitable. Downward assimilation, the model’s greatest worry, occurred when children assimilated *too quickly* into disadvantaged segments of American society, not when they failed to ‘assimilate enough’ as both prior models maintained.

Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003) excavate assimilation’s roots from the Chicago School sociologists of the early twentieth century (Park and Burgess 1921) to (re)argue that assimilation does not necessarily mean Americanization or Anglo conformity; instead, while immigrants change their language and culture the more they come into contact with the mainstream society, they also contribute new cultural or religious elements to the mainstream culture, effectively re-shaping the ‘majority’ society’s constitution. Anticipating critics who might argue that new (post 1965) immigrants are different from earlier immigrants who were considered white ethnics and more easily assimilated into the mainstream, Alba and Nee effectively demonstrate that new immigrant groups will likely assimilate because a) institutional changes in the post-Civil Rights era made it possible for new immigrants to be incorporated into society, and b) new immigrants will strategically assimilate into the mainstream if it is evident that it holds more economic opportunities than their ethnic enclaves, which it largely does for second generation individuals. Alba and Nee optimistically conclude that the new immigrant second generation helps shape the American mainstream, just as the early European ethnic groups contributed to what we now consider American mainstream society.

A decade-long study of second generation immigrants in New York City builds upon this more optimistic analysis by concluding that there is little evidence of second generation decline. This group of scholars compared new immigrant groups to native born youth comparison groups to argue that second generation decline was often

entangled with broader urban youth culture. On the contrary, their research demonstrates that there might be a distinct ‘second generation advantage’: “its location between two different social systems allows for creative and selective combinations of the two that can be highly conducive to success” (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters and Holdaway 2009: 354). They build upon Alba and Nee’s argument that the racial and ethnic makeup of American mainstream society has shifted in the last few decades, with more permeable boundaries between groups. Second generation individuals are often also able to appeal to advancement programs, such as affirmative action, that are designed to help native born racial minorities.

My research expands upon the last three models’ suggestions that the second generation might in fact creatively combine elements of the mainstream culture with aspects of their parental ethnic heritage. All three models, however, treat ethnic heritage as a static identity that the second generation simply derives from parental authority; yet, the rise in religiosity that I detect among my respondents is distinct from these models because the second generation in both countries often sees itself as distinct from the first generation—particularly in their different understandings of Islam. In fact, often first generation parents plead with their children to assimilate into mainstream Britain and America to avoid the ongoing harassment that Muslims suffer in both countries after the 2001 and 2005 terrorist attacks (Haddad 2007).²⁵ In other cases, mothers who immigrated to the West so they could be free from such rules imposed on women are often confused by their daughters choice to wear the *hijab* in the West.²⁶ Second generation Muslims seem to distance themselves from their

²⁵ For media coverage see: Harris, Sarah. May 29, 2010. “Young. British. Female. Muslim.” *The Sunday Times*.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article7135026.ece>;

²⁶ See Blake, John. August 12, 2009. “Muslim Women Uncover Myths About the *Hijab*” <http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/08/12/generation.islam.hijab/index.html>

parents' cultural expectations, distinguishing between their parents' 'cultural Islam,' which they believe is tainted by the customs and traditions of their sending countries, and their own 'purist Islam' in the West.

The attachment that my respondents demonstrate to their religious identity resembles theories of third-generation resurgence. Marcus Lee Hansen first offered Hansen's Law in 1938: "What the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember," as a theory to explain why the third generation might be more willing than the second generation to take pride in its ethnic past. Second generation individuals, he theorized, would be weighed down by insecurities of their foreign parentage and constantly wish to prove their Americanness; third generation individuals, however, would be secure in their Americanness and feel free to explore and record their heritage through the formation of associations (Hansen 1938). Will Herberg popularized this theory in his work on religion in America, and argued that Hansen's Law explained why there was a religious resurgence among third generation immigrants (Herberg 1954).

Herberg uses Hansen's Law of third generation resurgence to explain why we observe a religious revival in the middle of the twentieth century in America. He argues that individuals who have lost their sense of location turn to their grandparents' generation and selectively retrieve elements of their world—most notably religion—because their parents' adaptations do not appeal to them. While Herberg refers to the three predominant religions in America at the time—Protestants, Catholics and Jews—his theory informs my research on a new emerging religion on the American landscape—Islam. Yet, while we have close to no research on a Muslim third generation in America and scarcely any research on the third generation in Britain, my research suggests that the second generation in both countries has hastened to forge

connections to its religious heritage that Hansen and Herberg assumed would not occur until the third generation.

This group of second generation immigrants engages in a re-imagined version of the Muslim faith in the West that innovatively combines elements of American and British mainstream culture with fresh interpretations of religious scriptures. As Alba and Nee (2003) would argue, they comprise a minority identity group that contributes new religious elements to the make-up of British or American society—distinct from the first generation’s contributions. Instead of turning to their parents’ interpretation of their ethnic heritage, second generation individuals forge a new Muslim identity themselves. For the purposes of the dissertation in particular, I focus on the subset of second generation Muslim women who re-imagine a specifically egalitarian version of Islam that is distinct from the first generation’s version of the faith.

IV. SECOND GENERATION MUSLIM WOMEN RECLAIM ISLAM IN THE WEST

The examination of second generation Muslim women’s political behavior in both countries reveals striking similarities in the emergence of gender-justice activism. Specifically, activists run similar campaigns to fight the association between Islam and misogyny and do so in similar arenas of discourse. They find this false association in the public sphere, due to the media’s continuous misrepresentation of Muslim women as submissive and abused. They also find a misogynist interpretation of Islam within the private sphere of their own Muslim communities, which they blame on the first generation’s conflation of Islam with the customs and traditions from its countries of origin. The campaigns share a common fundamental goal: to reimagine each country’s standing Muslim identity into an egalitarian British/American Muslim identity.

While the gender-justice campaigns that respond to the false portrayal of Islam as a misogynist religion are not transnational in nature, I argue that British Muslim and American Muslim claims can be categorized along side one another in a typological theory according to: 1) the *targets* of their claims, and 2) the *frames* with which the claims are made. The first dimension describes the arenas of discourse in which Muslim women scholars and activists counter false impressions that link Islam with misogynist behavior. While targets of claims are traditionally understood to be actors (such as the state or corporate interests) I argue that the different forms of rebuttal should be understood according to their target audience or arena of discourse—the public or private sphere. As a result, I categorize rebuttals as *public claims* if they counter misrepresentation of Islam’s position on gender equality or *private claims* if they counter the misinterpretation of Islam’s position on gender equality that Muslims circulate within their own communities.

This typological theory illustrates that, on one hand, gender-justice activism in both countries makes claims on similar targets. The *frames* with which these claims are made, on the other hand, vary between *affirmative* and *transformative* frames. This second dimension attempts to answer how activists have used these different frames to articulate their similar rebuttals in different ways. This dimension focuses on the way that gender-justice claims are framed and expands upon how framing has been treated thus far in the relevant literature (Benford and Snow 2000). Instead of simply discriminating between the core framing tasks of diagnostic framing (identifying the problem) and prognostic framing (identifying a solution to the problem), I argue that such solutions should be further divided into the discursive process of making *affirmative claims* and *transformative claims*. Affirmative claims attempt to remedy inequitable outcomes without changing the underlying structure, while transformative claims attempt to remedy inequitable outcomes precisely by changing the underlying

structure. This distinction illustrates that framing claims should be understood as a constitutive process in proposing solutions to gender-justice problems. This *within-campaign* frame variation will be discussed in detail in chapter four, but it should be noted that the typology illustrates the interesting observation that transformative frames seem to emerge exclusively in the US. Chapter five will theorize why this variation occurs between the two countries and points to intervening structural conditions in the British state's use of religious corporatism.

A. Making Claims

According to scholars of contentious politics, claims (broadly speaking) can be broken down into three types: 1) identity claims, 2) standing claims and 3) program claims (Tilly and Tarrow 2007).²⁷ However, instead of dividing claims according to their purpose, I suggest that the following two dimensions—targets and frames—offer more analytical traction, particularly in regards to how claims adapt to different arenas of discourse and how their frames might be constitutive of the kind of justice they seek. **See Figure 1.1.**

²⁷ Identity claims declare that an actor exists, or might even be constituted during a contentious episode. These types of claims often set boundaries between one kind of identity and another, and also determine the relations inside and across these boundaries. Standing claims identify the rights to which the actor is entitled, based upon established group membership. And, finally, program claims lay out demands for the objects of claims to modify their behavior and act a certain way (Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

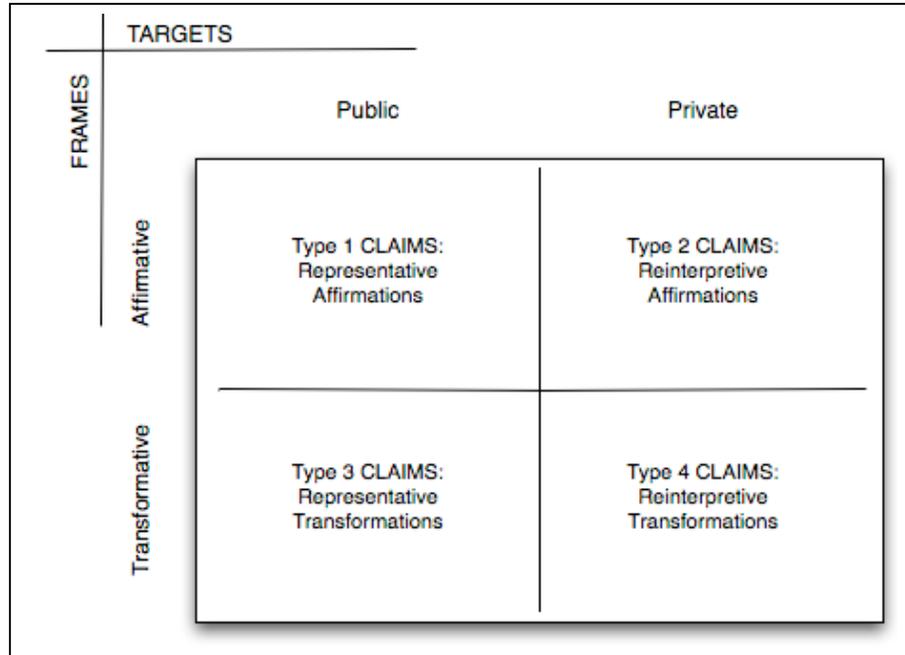


Figure 1.1: A Typology of Gender-justice Claims

1) Dimension One: Targeting Claims

Despite their different purposes, all claims involve “at least one subject reaching visibly towards at least one object” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 5). We know that the subjects of this study are gender-justice activists in both Britain and the US, but the different audiences they target determine the first variable with which to categorize their claims. I argue that claims-making analysis should consider targets outside of the ‘actor’ purview and might benefit from categorizing them into *public* vs. *private* spheres.

By dividing targets into these two categories, we learn more about the nature of the claims. The claims made on a public audience, for example, communicate a certain Muslim identity to the media, broader society, and state all at once. This observation indicates that the claims revolve around how Muslims are *represented* in the public sphere. Examples of misrepresentation include the media’s construction of

the British Muslim woman or American Muslim woman as a weak, submissive individual.

In contrast, claims made on private audiences are made within the Muslim community itself and usually focus on family law matters, such as domestic violence, marriage, divorce, custody, etc. As opposed to public claims of representation to non-Muslim audiences, private claims engage with rights of religious interpretation in the private sphere. These claims challenge prevailing norms of Islamic interpretation and involve interpretive strategies such as hermeneutics to dispute textual references for misogynistic practices.

2) *Dimension Two: Framing Claims*

Activists' claims also vary in the extent to which they are *framed* within existing Islamic norms, or whether they attempt to question the established norms themselves. Benford and Snow (2000) explain that framing theory relates to social movements because activists “negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change” (Benford and Snow 2000: 615) They argue that collective action frames have two characteristic features—core framing tasks and interactive, discursive processes that generate these frames. Core framing tasks include *diagnostic framing*, which identifies the problem and assigns blame or responsibility, and *prognostic framing*, which articulates the solution to the problem.

The dimension that distinguishes between *affirmative* and *transformative* claims builds upon the interactive, discursive processes that Benford and Snow argue generate frames. To be precise, some activist claims are *affirmative*, in that they aim to “correct inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the

underlying framework that generates them,” and other claims are *transformative*, in that they aim to “[correct] inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework” (Fraser 1997: 11). This dimension takes its cue from Nancy Fraser’s (1997) typology of justice struggles that differentiates between justice struggles that seek superficial fixes to inequitable outcomes and those that fight structural causes of inequality. For instance, an affirmative claim would seek to give women equal access to mosques, while a transformative claim would seek for women to be *imams*, questioning the conventional system that bestows this authority exclusively on men. This dimension exposes the possibility that frames can be constitutive of the actual solution posed to an example of gender-justice. In other words, does the frame seek superficial remedy in equal outcomes between genders or the long-term restructuring of gender relations themselves?

B. The Typology of Claims

These two dimensions generate a deductive typological theory of claims that organizes second generation gender-justice activism in both countries into four distinct categories. Typological theory specifies generalized pathways, characterized by the variables that constitute each dimension in the typology (George and Bennett 2005). The conjunctions of these variables are called ‘types’ and distinct types fill each quadrant. As George and Bennett argue, the purpose of the typology is to identify these generalized pathways, “whether the path has occurred only once, a thousand times, or is merely hypothesized as a potential path that has not yet occurred” (George and Bennett 2005: 236). The typology should thus be understood less as a descriptive organizational diagram and more as an analytical schema proposing what sort of activism might emerge given certain targets and framing of claims [See Figure 1].

In the first quadrant, type 1 claims are called *representative affirmations*, meaning that these claims will be made on public targets such as the media and broader society. The injustices that generate campaigns of this sort usually have to do with public prejudice, in the form of dress code discrimination against women wearing *hijab*, or misrepresentation by the media that portrays Muslim women as submissive, veiled individuals who are fundamentally oppressed by Islam. The affirmations denote claims that try to remedy inequitable representation of Islam's gender positions by simply offering alternative representation of Muslim women who do not conform to that stereotype. Type 1 claims are usually alternative media campaigns that try to 'normalize' the construction of the Muslim woman in the West. These campaigns often use mainstream media as a point of reference, without challenging its underlying assumptions, and fight for media standing to add a 'Muslim woman's voice' to existing debates. Chapter 2 will describe representative affirmations in detail.

Type 2 claims, in the second quadrant, are called *reinterpretive affirmations*. These claims are made within the Muslim community itself in both countries. Instead of public issues of recognition and representation, these claims counter conventional interpretations of Islam that associate the religion with misogynistic practices. The activists turn to hermeneutic scholarship that advocates alternative translations of the Qur'an, *Sunnah* and *hadith* to argue that Islam sought to liberate women from pre-Islamic misogynistic practices from the time of its founding in the seventh century. The reinterpretation of Islam counters that, somewhere along the way, cultural practices became conflated with Islamic practices and only a purist interpretation of the faith will once again recognize the religion's egalitarian agenda. Reinterpretive affirmations translate certain vocabulary or examine thematic passages in the Qur'an in an egalitarian manner, particularly the holy book's emphasis on respectful interactions between genders, without questioning the underlying framework of how

gender relations are constructed. Chapter 3 will discuss reinterpetive affirmations in detail.

Type 3 and type 4 claims are both framed transformatively, meaning that they both challenge an existing power structure while trying to remedy gender inequalities. *Representative transformations*, for instance, includes claims for female leadership in organizations, such as Muslim student organizations or adult civic organizations. Whereas existing norms in most Muslim communities in the West would argue that Islam only allows men to be leaders, activists making representative transformations argue that Muslim women should lead as well. *Reinterpetive transformations* also challenge prevailing interpretations of leadership in mosques and interpret the texts in such a way to support the idea that the Prophet himself encouraged women to be spiritual leaders.

Interestingly, while representative and reinterpetive affirmations emerge in both Britain and the US, representative and reinterpetive transformations only seem to emerge in the US. But why would activists who display so many similarities diverge when it comes to framing their claims? Framing claims is commonly understood as a strategic component of any campaign for two primary reasons: 1) to garner mass support and 2) to target certain objects. First, it is possible that transformative framing alienates individuals from supporting a particular gender-justice struggle, while affirmative framing makes the campaign seem less threatening and more appealing to a wide variety of people. Second, it is also possible that both public and private objects of claims might construct obstacles to transformative framing, by entrenching conservative interpretations of Islam; in response campaigns must first try affirmative framing to expand the dissenting community. Chapter four discusses why transformative framing seems to only emerge in the US, and points to the intervening variable of each state's relationship with religion as an explanation.

Specifically, the chapter interrogates the British system of religious corporatism to see if these brokered power relationships between the state and first generation Muslim male leaders inhibit the development of representative and reinterpetive transformations among British Muslim gender-justice activists.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

W.E.B. Du Bois was correct to say that the problem of the twentieth century would be the color line. By the time of his death, however, the racial make up of Western societies was already changing quickly with increasing immigration. Had he lived longer, he might have added to his voluminous writings on race an even more extensive analysis of the intersectionality of nationality, citizenship and race.

The Muslim identity is at the center of multicultural debates in the West about reconciling diverse populations and group interests with a commitment to liberal rights and individualism. Unfortunately, all too often the standing Muslim identity used in the multicultural project conflates misogynistic behavior with central religious teachings and the faith is portrayed as one that is fundamentally injurious to women. While Western mainstream feminists' intentions may be in the right place (to protect interests of women they fear might not be able to speak up against oppression in their own communities), a new generation of Muslim women is voicing dissent in both Britain and the US. Muslim women activists do not, as mainstream feminists insist, wish to exit their communities for their own safety— rather they strive to reclaim their faith from misrepresentation and misinterpretation, and engage in a project to reimagine its egalitarian roots. They fight for the agency to construct their own Muslim political identity.

These young women argue that the state's commitment to multiculturalism will counterproductively harm minority women if it continues to employ androcentric,

primocentric versions of the Muslim identity. Accordingly, activists make claims in the public and private spheres that wrestle Islam away from these biases. They refute the idea that multiculturalism must incorporate what they consider to be a fraudulent Muslim political identity and run similar campaigns in both countries making these claims. This surprisingly similar political behavior is the focus of this dissertation and these campaigns will be described in detail in the following two chapters. It is important to note, however, that these claims are often framed in different ways. This should highlight the diversity that exists within women's movements and activism and lead us to question why certain frames and tactics may be more practical for some and not others. The last two chapters take on this challenge and try to determine what gives rise to such diversity in activism. Regardless of the targets or frames that activists use to make their gender-justice claims, however, it is the main argument of this dissertation that second generation Muslim women are rising up in both Britain and the US to take control over their own political identities.

CHAPTER 2

REPRESENTATIVE ACTIVISM: HOW WOMEN COUNTER THE MEDIA'S MISREPRESENTATION OF THE MUSLIM WOMAN

If, as William Gamson argues, the purpose of the media in a democracy is to “provide readers with information about social forces that affect their lives” in order to cultivate a sense of active citizenship and political participation in society members (Gamson 1992: 373), then the public representation of minority groups is not only important for how majorities see minorities, but it also affects the political behavior of minority members themselves. Theorists of ‘media standing’ would even argue that it affects how much *power* Muslims exert in society. The Muslim minority group has become the central focus of debates over media representation in the West—from headscarf bans to editorial cartoons, media standing reflects whether they are seen as objects or subjects in their own representation. Media standing is a term borrowed from legal discourse, meant to designate the media as “contested terrain” (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, and Rucht 2002). This chapter demonstrates that, in both Britain and the US, a group of activists has emerged among second generation Muslim women who disagree with the mainstream media’s objectification of Muslim women; despite the differences between each country’s Muslim population, particularly in terms of socio-economic stratification and ethnic make up, each country’s mainstream media constructs an image of the Muslim woman that is submissive and oppressed. I argue that these activists battle for media standing through the creation of alternative media outlets that depict Muslim women as subjects in order to reclaim how Islam is portrayed the Western media.

This chapter explores the activism of second generation Muslim women that counters what they believe to be a negative representation of the ‘Muslim woman’ in

the mainstream media. This activism creates alternative media outlets that construct a more positive image of the Muslim woman as one who is strong, independent and, voluntarily identifies with her faith. Just as Ferree et al. (2002) operationalized media standing as the simple ‘appearance’ of a speaker in the media, I conceptualize the standing in question as any mention of Muslim women in the mainstream media; given that Ferree et al. consider ‘no comment’ to represent the *opportunity* to make a substantive comment, I look at any media that merely involves Muslim women in the same logic. My respondents argue that the ‘Muslim woman’ is most often reduced to a simple, veiled, oppressed individual—noting that veiling in particular is important because it is the easiest visual marker used to identify Muslims in the West. Veiling has always been a flashpoint in Western debates. Indeed, from colonial to contemporary debates, critics of veiling question whether Western values can allow a practice that allegedly forces women to cover themselves in public. The debate over veiling is not new to my respondents, but it does exhaust them. They say whenever veiling is the center of a debate, Muslim women will more likely than not be portrayed as weak and oppressed. In response, they must battle for media standing and create alternative representations of veiled women that show they constitute a diverse group.

In section one, I offer a brief overview of how the veil has historically become a point of conflict in relationships between colonizers and their colonized subjects. I argue that these debates persisted after colonial relationships ended and have now been reincarnated as debates in Western multicultural liberal democracies that are, at present, trying to negotiate whether immigrant Muslim minority women ought to be able to wear the veil. These ongoing debates about civil liberties denote the importance of how veiled women are represented in the media—veiling’s critics rely on its (negative) association with oppression or terrorism to argue that the practice challenges Western notions of egalitarianism, while its proponents rely upon its

(positive) association with religious commitment and diverse women to argue that the practice symbolizes voluntary modesty. In section two, I investigate with the contemporary representation of the veiled Muslim woman in the media against the backdrop of *Islamophobia* in the West and use a combination of *media framing* theory and original content analysis to demonstrate that it is a predominantly negative representation. Next, in section three, I examine how this negative representation has given rise to a wave of reactive Muslim women's media activism that battles for *media standing* by creating alternative media outlets that allow them to transform these frames into a more positive image of the Muslim woman. Lastly, I end this chapter with a discussion of other media outlets that are emerging in the form of literary and artistic activism in both countries.

I. VEILING THE MUSLIM WOMAN

Though there are many variations of Muslim women's modest dress that covers their hair and/or bodies, including the *hijab*, headscarf, *niqab*, *burqa*, and veil, I refer to all forms as *veiling* in this chapter for the sake of simplicity. The mandate for veiling in the Qur'an is most commonly traced to the following passage discussing modesty:

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their *zeenah* (charms, or beauty and ornaments) except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their *khimar* (veils) over their bosoms and not display their *zeenah* except to their husbands, their fathers and that they should not strike their feet so as

to draw attention to their hidden *zeenah* (ornaments).

(24:31-32)²⁸

Another verse telling the wives and daughters of the Prophet to cover in public to distinguish themselves from others is also cited,²⁹ but the verse above is believed to address women in general. Activists explain that the variation of veiling they choose, or their choice not to veil at all, relies upon their interpretation of ‘modesty’ at the beginning of the verse.

Activists in both countries express the frustration they feel at the “Western obsession” with veiling and say they are exhausted by researchers’ attempts to decipher *why* Muslim women choose to veil. While many researchers continue to ask such questions, perhaps assuming that individual-level decisions are indicative of a larger political statement, my research is more interested in the signaling capacity of veiling—that is, how does such a visible marker of the Muslim faith affect the construction of the Muslim identity in the West? How do historical and contemporary debates about gender and Islam—that often draw on the veil as a core example—shape how the ‘Muslim woman’ is represented in the media? And how do activists counterframe the practice of veiling to portray the Muslim woman in a more positive light?

²⁸ Verse 24:31-32, as translated by Yusuf Ali or Muhammad Asad and cited by The Muslim Women’s League, December 1997:

<http://www.mwlusa.org/topics/dress/hijab.html>.

²⁹ In particular, verse 33:58: “Those who harass believing men and believing women undeservedly, bear (on themselves) a calumny and a grievous sin. O Prophet! Enjoin your wives, your daughters, and the wives of true believers that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad) That is most convenient, that they may be distinguished and not be harassed.”

A. Historical Debates

Veiling is one of many historical examples that students of colonialism encounter when they study the justification offered for imperial behavior. Just as British colonizers claimed to save South Asian women from *sati* and child marriage, history is full of cases from Egypt to Algeria, where not only colonizers argued that they were liberating women from backwards practices, but they were also joined by ‘colonial feminists’ arguing the same (Lazreg 1994; Ahmed 1992; Spivak 1988). Veiling, in particular, was argued by colonials to be an oppressive practice in Muslim societies that violated women’s rights and represented Islam’s fundamentally regressive position on gender equality (Ahmed 1992; Abu-Lughod 2002).

In reality however, veiling was a pre-Islamic practice adopted in non-Arab Middle Eastern and Mediterranean societies and originally marked the seclusion of elite women (MacDonald 2006; Ahmed 1992; Hoodfar 1993). Scholars argue that Muslims only began justifying the practice of veiling in the name of Islam in the nineteenth century, after colonials promoted the veil as a symbol of primitive behavior in Muslim societies (Hoodfar 1992; Esposito 1988). In addition to colonizers who wanted to degrade colonial subjects by claiming that their traditions demeaned women, colonial feminists engaged in a project to ‘save Muslim women’ that scholars argue hypocritically ignored the problems that colonial feminists faced themselves. In spite of the restrictive education, employment and even dresscodes (e.g. corsets) that plagued Western women at home, they pursued a double standard of liberating Muslim women from Muslim men (Hoodfar 1992; Mabro 1991).

In collusion with colonizers, upper-class subjects often advocated de-veiling as a step towards modernization (Haddad 2007). Nationalists responded by taking up veiling as their cause, arguing that it was part of the Islamic tradition and their fellow countrymen/women needed to resist colonial and elite efforts to stop the practice.

Veiled women effectively became the symbol for colonial resistance and symbolically represented cultural preservation. The voices of Muslim women themselves were lost in this battle between colonizers and nationalists, in a way that forecast their contemporary marginalized position between multiculturalism and its feminist critics in the West.

Traces of these colonial relationships continue to appear in more contemporary interactions between Western and Eastern women's rights activists. Homa Hoodfar (1992) describes Western feminist, Kate Millet, and her trip to Iran after its announcement in the 1980s that veiling would be made compulsory. She compares Millet's trip to the colonial relationship between Western colonizers and feminists who arrived in colonies and lectured on women's rights; colonizers did so to convince the colonies that they were 'backwards' and needed to adapt to modernity, and feminists lectured "as though [their] political ideas, life expectations and experiences were universally applicable" (Hoodfar 1992: 2). Likewise, she says Millet's disinterest in acknowledging Iranian women's rights movements resembles the indifference of colonial feminists to women's rights struggles that already existed among colonized subjects.

Other contemporary Western feminists have also been criticized for allegedly replicating this antagonistic relationship by traveling outside of the West and trying to impose their ideas of gender equality without concern for local culture.³⁰ However, now the relationship between Westerners who see the veil as an instrument used to oppress, and those who defend the practice has shifted to West itself. With increased migration from Muslim majority countries to Western countries in Europe and North America, now Western critics of the veil have the unique opportunity to make their

³⁰ For instance, see Eve Ensler's monologue about the *burqa* in Afghanistan, entitled "Under the *Burqa*" in *The Vagina Monologues*.

arguments on their own soil. In some countries, such as France and Germany, Western feminists are more outspoken and openly advocate for legislation prohibiting the veil in public places. In other countries, such as Britain and the US, the media plays more of a primary role in constructing how the public understands the veil.

B. Contemporary Debates

Contemporary debates in Western countries revolve around the question of whether the immigrant Muslim minority should be allowed to retain veiling practices that they, presumably, would have practiced in their sending countries. This debate centers around migration and the idea that once an adult is socialized for the large part of his or her life in one culture, it would be unnecessarily cruel or unfairly demanding to ask him or her to abandon familiar practices in order to settle in what is meant to be a new, multicultural, tolerant Western country. Veiling's opponents argue that the practice serves as a visible marker of difference and the immigrant's unwillingness to assimilate to the host culture; a feminist subgroup of this camp argues that the practice oppresses women and prevents them from fully participating in society.³¹

Veiling's advocates are usually considered to be vocal spokesmen from the minority Muslim community, often arguing a civil rights angle that says the Muslim minority should not be discriminated against for their religious practice—particularly in the West, with its historical narratives of both religious persecution and tolerance.³²

³¹ See media coverage of a debate between second-wave feminist Phyllis Chesler (in opposition to the veil) and third-wave feminist Naomi Wolf (in defense of the veil): http://www.salon.com/life/broadsheet/feature/2009/09/05/veil_debate.

³² See a report by the Fawcett Society: "The veil, feminism and Muslim women: a debate" December 14, 2006. Available online: <http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:mDFwX4xp9ZwJ:www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/Veil%2520debate%2520report.pdf+muslim+council+of+britain+veil&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESgRxC19QP3vMKmlUoWWekO442l8S9n2GbzNNj3iFojyavMfZDfbwnYVIfq4x3nuY2pk->

However, a new group has emerged in Western countries that negotiates whether to allow immigrants to retain these traditions that seemingly conflict with mainstream norms: daughters of Muslim immigrants, who are increasingly donning the veil for a variety of reasons (Haddad 2007). Putting their reasons aside for a moment, the fact remains that this generation of women challenges the contemporary debates over veiling in the West. While the debate assumes that the conflict resides in first generation immigrants being torn between the traditions they purportedly left in their sending countries and new Western norms, second generation women *are* Western. They were born and raised in the West, have Western citizenship, and feel more at home in their Western countries than the sending countries from which their parents migrated. Often their mothers choose to take off the veil after leaving countries where they did not have the option, yet the daughters, under no similar pressure, choose to put on the veil.³³ How do contemporary discussions about veiling in the West take the second generation's needs into consideration?

In the sections below, I first engage with the contemporary debate over veiling in France, to demonstrate an instance where Western feminists advocate legislation that would prohibit veiling in public. Then I move on to explain how the debate operates in countries that have made no national move to ban veiling, such as Britain and the US. In these two countries, the debate questions where and when the practice of veiling is appropriate, usually through localizing decisions and leaving the matter to local jurisdiction. This public discourse is shaped by the media's representation of Muslim women, which will be discussed in detail in the second section.

[PHgdYLSyqI9bxiOdLfaUgz76ntR1ek6xRX4h07HA82LP8cjin7zuijRQwOdPzeB0UEBG&sig=AHIEtbSMOE44aZWPdnFvS8aHOC46Q_rYhg](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/the-many-faces-behind-the-veil-1865772.html)

³³ See the media coverage of a diverse group of Muslim women who explain their different reasons for choosing to wear the veil:
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/the-many-faces-behind-the-veil-1865772.html>.

1) France

In 2004, France passed legislation that prohibited the wearing or display of overtly religious symbols in public schools.³⁴ While the restrictions technically included large Christian crosses and Jewish yarmulkes, critics argued that the ban's true intentions were to single out Muslim women for the use of headscarves, dubbing it the 'headscarf ban.'³⁵ In spite of second generation Muslim women's complaints that they were being forced to take off their veils, rather than being forced *to wear* them by relatives, French feminists supported the ban. Elisabeth Badinter, for example, argued "Soon feminists in the rest of Europe will realize the headscarf is a terrible symbol of submission. You cannot denounce what has been going on in Afghanistan while tolerating the veil in Europe - even if women claim they are wearing it voluntarily."³⁶ Badinter and other feminists argued that the French system of secularism, called *laïcité*, was born out of a battle against religious imperialism, indicating that it was important to separate the laws of man from the laws of God. Second generation women who argue that such neutrality is meant for teachers to exhibit in a position of authority in school, and not for their students among one another, are met with arguments about the oppressive message of the headscarf and disbelief that anyone would choose to wear it voluntarily.³⁷

In 2010, the lower house of the French parliament decided to expand the ban on religious symbols in public schools to the broader public sphere. In July, an overwhelming 336 members voted in favor of a ban on the *burqa* (face veil) while only one member opposed on grounds that the ban represented nothing more than the

³⁴ See <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/07/13/france.burqa.ban/index.html>

³⁵ see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3478895.stm>

³⁶ See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/feb/01/france.schoolsworldwide>

³⁷ Ibid.

fear of the Other that would eventually lead to totalitarianism. A number of the remaining 557 members were Socialist Party members who wanted the ban limited to public buildings only; instead of restricting the bill, however, these members abstained from voting after coming under pressure from French feminists.³⁸ Once again, feminists made arguments about the oppressive nature of the *burqa* and cited public opinion that stated nearly 80% of the French public was in favor of such a ban.³⁹

This time around Muslim critics who opposed the ban were joined by some Western American feminists who argued that such restrictions were unconscionable in democracies allegedly committed to equal liberty. Martha Nussbaum, for example, writes that all five major reasons given in support of the ban (1-security, 2-communication, 3-sexual objectification, 4-coercion, 5-comfort and hygiene) apply their logic inconsistently to non-Muslim behavior, effectively discriminating against Muslim women. For instance, she argues: “Many beloved and trusted professionals cover their faces all year round: surgeons, dentists, (American) football players, skiers and skaters. What inspires fear and mistrust in Europe, clearly, is not covering per se, but Muslim covering.”⁴⁰ Still, the head of the French women’s rights group, *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*, Sihem Habchi, argued in favor of the bill because the full veil is the “banner of sectarian ideology” and threatens “human dignity.”⁴¹

³⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10611398>

³⁹ See Pew Research Center Report, “Widespread Support For Banning Full Islamic Veil in Western Europe” July 8, 2010. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1658/widespread-support-for-banning-full-islamic-veil-western-europe-not-in-america>

⁴⁰ See Nussbaum’s editorial in *The New York Times* in opposition to France’s ban on the *burqa*, July 11, 2010: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/07/11/veiled-threats/>.

⁴¹ Habchi’s remarks in an essay in *Liberation*, as cited in <http://www.csmonitor.com/From-the-news-wires/2010/0713/Burqa-ban-approved-by-French-lower-house-of-parliament>.

2) Britain and the US

In contrast to the high-profile opposition to veiling demonstrated by French feminists, feminists in both Britain and the US have either refrained from comment or argued that a ban would violate the rights of Muslim women who choose to veil. In both countries' cases, it is likely that the combination of stronger anti-racist narratives than those that exist in France, and the development of third-wave feminism highlighting minority women's concerns, leads to greater consideration for Muslim women's interests. When the veil is questioned in either country, it is usually over isolated incidents such as young girls wearing the veil while playing soccer or a veiled woman being asked to uncover herself before entering a bank.⁴² Neither country has made a national move to ban the veil, and even those politicians who have spoken out against it have done so without party or government backing.

Britain's debate peaked around one such controversy started by Member of Parliament (MP) Jack Straw in 2006, when he asked his Muslim women constituents to remove their full-face veil before visiting him in his constituent surgery.⁴³ Straw's comments caused an uproar among both liberal multiculturalists and British Muslims, who argued that his comments were racist and went against the multicultural ethos.⁴⁴ As recently as July 2010, another MP, Phillips Hollobone, declared that he refuses to hold meetings with Muslim women wearing full Islamic dress, unless they lift their

⁴² See media coverage of these isolated incidents:
<http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS201321+02-Feb-2009+PRN20090202>; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3585377.stm>.

⁴³ For Jack Straw's comments that sparked the debate, see:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/oct/06/politics.uk>. For coverage of the row that followed, see: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_politics/5410472.stm.

⁴⁴ See media coverage blaming an increase of racist attacks against Muslims on Straw's comments:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/oct/06/jackstrawmissthepoint>.

face veil.⁴⁵ Hollobone argues that the majority of human communication is done through the sight of one another's faces and believes that representatives and constituents should be able to trust one another enough to show their faces. In both Straw and Hollobone's cases, however, the MPs lacked government backing for a policy that would require women to lift their veils, leaving the matter to one of local constituency preferences. Activists among the Muslim population, however, took Straw's statements as evidence that they need to defend their right to wear the veil because it might be under threat.

Rajnaara Akhtar, for example, started a British organization called *The Assembly for the Protection of Hijab* in 2003, while France was still discussing the ban that would eventually pass in 2004. While Akhtar does not believe that a ban would ever succeed in Britain, she believes it was important to demonstrate to governments around the world that there were Muslim women in the West who considered it an important civil liberty to be able to express their faith through covering themselves. She argues:

But the reason we were concerned was first because France was moving towards effectively banning the *hijab* in educational institutions. There were other European countries that had already covertly taken such steps as well and we just thought that for us as Muslim women who freely wear the *hijab* and really believe that it's our human right in terms of religious freedom to do it, we really did feel that we had to start speaking out against it. There were lots of stereotypes where the *hijab*

⁴⁵ See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/champion-of-uk-burka-ban-declares-war-on-veilwearing-constituents-2028669.html>

is concerned, where Muslim women are concerned really, but especially with the *hijab*. For me personally I got involved because part of the problem was that we as muslim women weren't willing to speak out about it, we weren't willing to go out there and say, hey this is my decision, I want to do it. Instead, the stereotypes of muslim women as being oppressed were being perpetuated because muslim men were actually speaking out about it, on our behalf. Because that actually almost confirms the stereotype that it's the men who are making you do this.

Akhtar does not sense the same danger to British Muslim women's civil liberties that she senses happened in France, but she believes it is important to preemptively organize for women's rights in case such restrictions are ever proposed in Britain as well.

The British debate over the veil has otherwise been restricted to individual cases where women are told to remove their veil for professional reasons. One case that gained national attention in 2006 involved a teacher in northern England who refused to take off her face veil when teaching her eleven year-old pupils.⁴⁶ The school chose to suspend her after the British High Court upheld the position that teachers and pupils need to be able to see each other's faces to communicate properly, allowing schools to ban face veils in their uniform codes.⁴⁷ While most activists I interviewed argued that the French ban on wearing the veil in public egregiously violated Muslim

⁴⁶ See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6068408.stm.

⁴⁷ See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/6466221.stm.

women's civil liberties, they appeared to believe that professional considerations were important in deciding where it is appropriate to wear the veil.

For example, one British Muslim activist, age 24, who works as teacher herself at an Islamic school, argues that the teacher in question should not have been wearing a full face-veil in front of such young children:

Firstly, I think she was quite stupid because she was told not to take it off in front of other peers... interaction is a MUST in a primary school, if you're in a female only environment, which you are in a primary school most of the time, you take it off-you don't have to wear it. Secondly, when there's that high level of interaction needed, you can't wear a veil. If I saw someone, personally, in a school wearing a veil, I'd go mad and tell her to take it off. If my child was in that school, and her teacher was wearing the veil, I would pull her out because it would be unacceptable to me. The whole purpose of wearing the veil is modesty, and in a teaching environment, you don't need to sit there and look at someone like that.... as far as I was concerned, it was a publicity stunt.

She suggests that the case was more about publicity, either on the side of male Muslim leaders who wanted to 'win symbolic victories' for the community, or on the side of the state, who wanted to keep minorities in line. When asked to elaborate, she demurs, which seems to insinuate that she is less certain of evidence but confidently cynical of the case's merit. Yet though she does not believe the teacher in question was correct

in veiling in school, she does believe the practice of veiling needs to be protected in general:

I was wearing the veil at that time...I did go on national television, I did promote it, saying that there was nothing wrong with it—I got in a brow, in fact, on morning television once where a woman was telling me ‘look, you don’t have to wear this’ and I said ‘but it’s my choice! You don’t have the right to tell me you can’t’... [though] there are certain circumstances where I don’t think you should wear it, like around children.

The activist could be correct in suggesting that the northern England case was not supported by the broad Muslim women’s community. After the court ruled in 2007 that it was up to the school’s discretion to dictate dress code, within reasonable standards—effectively striking down the minority multicultural claim that Muslim male leaders were hoping to win—there was little reaction among Muslim women activists.

The debate over veiling in the US also manifests itself in legal battles that challenge a Muslim woman’s right to cover her face: a *hijabi* woman in southern California was told for security reasons that she could not enter her federal credit union while wearing her headscarf;⁴⁸ in Oklahoma, a young *hijabi* girl was suspended from her public school because she refused to remove her headscarf;⁴⁹ and in Philadelphia, a *hijabi* police officer was told she must remove her headscarf while on

⁴⁸ <http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS201321+02-Feb-2009+PRN20090202>

⁴⁹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3585377.stm>

duty.⁵⁰ In the case of the federal credit union, civil rights groups demanded that the Department of Justice conduct an investigation of religious discrimination and the credit union apologized to the woman, claiming that they were trying to work through a new policy prohibiting headgear and would allow headscarves in the future. The US Justice Department actually filed a complaint on behalf of the young girl in Oklahoma, citing the equal protection clause of the US Constitution and claiming that the young girl had been a victim of religious discrimination; the school eventually allowed her back in school, wearing her headscarf.

In the case of the Philadelphia police officer, however, a federal appeals court upheld the Philadelphia Police Department's policy that prohibited Muslims from wearing headscarves on the job and ruled that accommodating the officer would severely damage the department's appearance of religious neutrality. Oddly, though it was ultimately reviewed by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, the case received little to no media coverage and was most frequently discussed on law blogs online.⁵¹ In spite of this development, when asked about the right to wear *hijab* in the US, my respondents largely believe that this right is secure in the US.

And besides these isolated incidents, veiling rights for Muslim women in both Britain and the US do seem secure at the moment, with activists like Akhtar emerging to pre-empt restrictive legislation rather than react to it. However, while respondents did not express concern that either state would restrict their rights to wear the veil, many women mentioned the role the media plays in exacerbating misrepresentations of veiled women. I argue that we should understand second generation Muslim

⁵⁰ <http://www.litigationandtrial.com/2009/04/articles/the-law/for-law-students/third-circuit-upholds-philadelphia-polices-ban-on-headscarves-without-a-word-on-the-first-amendment/s>

⁵¹ See blog coverage on the law-related blog *Findlaw*: http://blogs.findlaw.com/law_and_life/2009/04/muslim-police-officer-kimberlie-webb-loses-discrimination-claims-based-on-headscarf-ban-workplace-dr.html.

women's media involvement as another form of activism to reform not only how veiling is understood in the West, but also how gender in Islam is broadly framed. As will be explained below, activists generate their own representations of veiling in the media because they see the media as a crucial social institution that helps construct the second generation Muslim identity in the West.

For the most part, contemporary debates address second generation women as victims of male and even female relatives who force them to veil against their wishes. Instead, activists argue, many second generation women voluntarily cover themselves for a variety of reasons. Williams and Vashi (2007) argue that some women use the veil to buy themselves more mobility outside of the home, if their parents are worried that they might otherwise fall prey to Western corruptive values; others use it to distance themselves from their Westernized, assimilative parents who failed to pass on an 'authentic Muslim identity' (282-284). They argue that feminist anti-veil criticism does not take the second generation's strategy of negotiating freedom from parental authority into serious enough consideration. To the second generation, the veil is more than a marker of cultural preservation or an instrument of oppression—in contrast, it can take on the symbolic value of liberation. Activists believe that media representations that exclusively portray the veil in this oppressive light must be modified to include accounts of the liberating perspective as well.

II. MEDIA REPRESENTATION AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

Scholars who study media representation argue that the media can construct images through the use of framing, but the process of making social meaning depends on how readers determine the meaning of the images (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes and Sasson 1992). While general framing theory involves activists "negotiat[ing] a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of

change, mak[ing] attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulat[ing] an alternative set of arrangements, and urg[ing] others to act in concert to affect change” (Benford and Snow 2000: 615), *media framing* refers to the media’s production of images that can help construct social realities (Gamson et al 1992, Gamson & Wolsfeld 1993, Ryan 1991, Scheufele 1999). Media frames are crucial to the activism emerging among second generation women because they try to correct negative frames advanced by the mainstream media that depict Muslim women as weak or dangerous, but perpetually veiled, characters. In correcting these negative frames, they turn to counterframing the Muslim woman in their own alternative media outlets.

Counterframing, also theorized by Benford and Snow, is the refutation of an opponent’s logic or, in the case of the media, the refutation of the media’s version of reality (Benford and Snow 2000). They explain, “The important point is that opposing framing activity can affect a movement’s framings, on the one hand, by putting movement activists on the defensive, at least temporarily, and, on the other hand, by frequently forcing it to develop and elaborate prognoses more clearly than otherwise might have been the case” (2000: 617). Accordingly, the activists I interviewed articulated the first level of reacting to the misrepresentation, and then the second level of using that misrepresentation as motivation to develop their ideas further. In the next section, I examine two transnational news websites, Muslimah Media Watch and Altmuslimah, that have emerged among young women in the Muslim diaspora. These sites serve as portals of this activism where women publish critical essays about misrepresentation in the media, and publicize their own alternative frames of the Muslim woman through literary and artistic activism.

Activists in both countries argue that the mainstream media employs the veil to construct an image of the Muslim woman that is perpetually weak, submissive and oppressed. Scholars argue that media framing has a symbiotic relationship with

political context, and, in this case, such framing occurs within a context of *Islamophobia* in the West. Gottschalk and Greenberg (2008) define Islamophobia as a largely unexamined, yet deeply ingrained “anxiety towards Islam and Muslim cultures...[that] relies on a sense of otherness” (5). While they concentrate on Islamophobia in the United States’ media, particularly in political cartoons, Jonathan Birt (2009) explains that Islamophobia has played a large role in constructing the Muslim identity in Britain as well. He argues that Islamophobia conflates ethnically disparate communities as ‘all Muslim’ and this urges reactive identity construction on the part of Muslims to take control over how their identity is defined.

This anxiety towards Islam has appeared historically through public representations of Muslim women. Up until roughly the twentieth century, literature and colonial travel writing painted Muslim women as the “personification of desire” and harems were used to make the association between unveiling and sexual fantasies (Haddad 2007; Macdonald 2006). As the harem’s salience faded, contemporary representations of Muslim women continued to portray them as the submissive, secluded women the harem had housed through media constructions of the veil.

Scholars argue that Islamophobia has surged in the post 9/11 climate, as have negative representations of Muslim women and the practice of veiling (Greenberg and Gottschalk 2008; Cooke 2007; Haddad 2007; Macdonal 2006; Nayak 2006). Miriam Cooke argues that Muslim women, in the aftermath of 9/11, have become the evident representatives of the Muslim Other because of the visibility of their veils. She coins the term ‘Muslimwoman’ to draw attention to the “newly entwined religious and gendered identification that overlays national, ethnic, cultural, historical and even philosophical diversity” (Cooke 2007: 140) and contends that this label reduces all

diversity to a single image.⁵² Moreover, the Muslimwoman, she argues, is caught between Western and Muslim audiences who each want to infuse the veil with their own meaning: “Under Western eyes, an essential (usually negative) Islam is encoded by the oppressed Muslimwoman; in Muslim societies under threat from non-Muslims the Muslimwoman represents an equally essential (but this time positive) Islam” (Cooke 2007: 142). She concludes that young Muslim women in the West are paradoxically attempting to deploy the Muslimwoman identification in order to change it. I refer to this strategy in detail in the next section, when I discuss how the activists I interviewed generate their own alternative public representations of the Muslim woman.

The intensification in Islamophobia after the 9/11 attacks in the US was also felt in Britain, as “the host society and the media were ascribing identities to [Muslims] that distances them from the host and connected them to a constructed notion of their faith group” (Afshar, Aitken and Franks 2005: 276-77). The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia published a 2002 report on the prevalence of Islamophobia across the European Union in the aftermath of 9/11, recounting that the British media included “very basic Islamic stereotypes” and devoted an inordinate amount of coverage to “extremist Muslim groups” while “less sensationalist Muslim voices were mainly overlooked” (Allen and Nielsen 2002: 29).

Numerous British activists referred to a sense of Islamophobia that took hold of the British public after 9/11, and argued that it only intensified after the London bombings on July 7, 2005. One student activist from London explained the harassment that spiked after the 2005 attacks: “Pretty much everyone I know had ‘terrorist’ yelled at them at some point. Especially the girls though, because we’re

⁵² Cooke (2007) follows both Sherman Jackson’s (2005) use of the term ‘blackamerican’ that connects the concepts of race and citizenship, and Joan Martin’s (2000) use of ‘blackwoman’ that connects race and gender.

obviously walking targets a lot of the time. One of my friends wasn't physically attacked, but verbally attacked by a man who was yelling at her 'you should go back to your own country!'" A community organizer from Birmingham similarly explained the shift she felt in public hostility after the attacks: "When I first put the veil on, there wasn't this so-called Islamophobic atmosphere. Before 9/11 and 7/7 and all that kind of thing, it was a different atmosphere to put the veil on. Whereas now, I feel if I walked in to do a presentation on forced-marriages, I [would have to] explain myself and say I don't represent extremism." For both of these activists, the veil operates as a visible marker that makes them vulnerable in an Islamophobic environment.

The post 9/11, post 7/7 hostility towards the veil reveals an important transition in how both British and American societies have constructed the image of the Muslim woman. Whereas certain representations still concentrate on the oppression that the veil allegedly represents, there has been an increase in accounts that suggest veiled women may be security concerns. Michelle Byng (2010) conducts critical discourse analysis of seventy-two stories from *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* that discuss veiling in the context of politics in Britain, the US and France. She concludes that the newspaper stories suggest that all three nations share an ideological perspective that would limit veiling in public, because it is seen as the failure of Muslim minorities to integrate successfully into Western countries (Byng 2010: 112).

Byng is particularly interested in the media's role in shaping the public's new understanding of veiling that revolves around security concerns (123). Her analysis suggests that the media portrays American assimilation in a more voluntary way than the legislative methods of Britain and France, yet she argues that the desired end result is the same—that Muslim women should not veil because "the July 2005 bombings, in combination with [the] 11 September [bombings] ... made the tethering of Muslim

identity to fear and threat easy” (120). Her analysis corresponds to recent 2010 polling data that reports a majority of the British (62%) and French (82%) public in favor of a ban on the *burqa*, while a majority of US (65%) *disapproves* of such a legislative public ban.⁵³

More extensive polling data reveals, however, that the American reluctance to legislate veiling prohibition does not translate into widespread acceptance of veiling or the Muslim identity. In 2006, the Pew Global Attitudes survey reported that 69% of non-Muslim Americans felt that Muslims were ‘not respectful of women.’ (Pew GAP 2006: 31). While another Pew Research Center report on Islamic Extremism and public opinion informs us that a majority of the US (57%) public has a favorable opinion of Islam, it also reports that 22% of Americans view Islam in an unfavorable manner, versus only 7% viewing Judaism unfavorably and 6% viewing Christianity unfavorably. The same poll reports that, of those respondents who believe some religions are more prone to violence, an overwhelming majority (67%) believe Islam is more violent than Christianity (9%) or Judaism (4%).⁵⁴

Scholars who study media and public opinion seem to agree that media frames can have a substantial effect on the audience’s public opinion and policy preferences, whether the media source is in print or on television (Ansolabehere, Behr, and Iyengar 1993; Page, Shapiro and Dempsey 1987). Moreover, public opinion is not typically based on direct and certain knowledge, but on a world that the media helps the reader imagine (Lippmann 1922: 10). Activists in both Britain and the US lamented the

⁵³ See Pew Global Attitudes Project Spring 2010 Report: “Obama More Popular Abroad Than at Home, Global Image of US Continues to Benefit.” <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1658/widespread-support-for-banning-full-islamic-veil-western-europe-not-in-america>

⁵⁴ See Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2005 Report: “Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics.” <http://pewglobal.org/2005/07/14/islamic-extremism-common-concern-for-muslim-and-western-publics/>.

obstacles that the mainstream media places in their way by misrepresenting Muslim women:

Every single time the media talks about muslim women, like, once in the metro, there was this picture of a muslim veiled woman, the media is obsessed with the veil—I always see images of women like this and it was just to show that elections in India were taking place, like women in India had just cast a vote and they have to show the veil? Why are they so obsessed with the veil?

--*Student activist, London, 21*

When they want to talk about a Muslim woman, what does it look like? Instead of using a picture of an uncovered woman, they'll pick one with a *hijab*, even though Muslim women range. When the media interviewed me once, they put a picture of me and then put a picture of a woman with a headscarf right next to me. Why? the interview's about me, right? --*Leader, British Muslim women's organization, Birmingham, 40*

I went to college shortly after 9/11 and it was the first time anyone was telling me that I'm not American... just in terms of the media and on the news, if you see these images and the way that people talk about Muslims. --*Student organizer, Northern Virginia, 25*

It is this public imagination that second generation Muslim women want to alter through media activism. Whether the media represents the Muslim woman as a helpless or hazardous character, the activists I interviewed believed that both approaches infringe upon their ability to represent themselves. They counter the media's deployment of the veil as negative symbol by battling for standing and specifically portraying the veil in an alternative, positive light.

A. The Construction of the 'Muslim Woman' in the Mainstream Media

In order to examine the counterframing exchange in this section, I use content analysis of mainstream media outlets to examine whether activists' perceptions of the mainstream media's negative tone towards veiling and Muslim women are indeed accurate. Given that my respondents claim that the mainstream media constructs a negative image of the Muslim woman, particularly by depicting veiled woman as either oppressed or dangerous, I am interested in determining whether this negative bias may be objectively gauged or whether it might be activists' perceived bias.

1) Methodology

In order to investigate the *positive* or *negative* tone of mainstream media coverage of veiling, I use Yoshikoder software, a multi-lingual content analysis program that was developed as part of the Identity Project at Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.⁵⁵ This program analyzes the tone of textual data, by comparing given documents against a General Inquirer (GI) dictionary of the words coded as either 'positive' or 'negative' in the English language. The program also allows the user to custom-code certain words that are particular to her research questions.

⁵⁵ This open-sourced software and description are available at: <http://www.yoshikoder.org/>.

I created two original datasets, each of which is comprised of a randomly selected sample of 200 news stories from each country's 'newspaper of record,' *The Times (London)* in Britain and *The New York Times* in the US, during a fifteen-year period between January 1, 1995 and July 22, 2010.⁵⁶ The first data set is composed of articles that mentioned *both* 'Islam' and any form of Muslim women's covering: *hijab*, headscarf, *burqa*, *niqab*, and veiling;⁵⁷ for the purposes of simplicity, I continue to refer to all varieties of covering as 'veiling.' In order to make sure that the mention of veiling was not spurious with my dependent variable of negative tone, I also created a second data set made of articles that mentioned 'Muslim woman' or 'Muslim women.'⁵⁸ This dataset examines activists' claims that the mainstream media constructs the image of the 'Muslim woman' in a negative manner. I also customized the GI dictionary with a supplemental list of negative terms that materialized in interviews when activists described what they believed to constitute 'negative words' describing veiled Muslim women.

2) Results

When I ran a dictionary report against my sample, the results demonstrate that there is a clear inclination towards using a negative tone to describe the practice of veiling. **See Figure 2.1.**

⁵⁶ I chose these papers because they are considered the 'papers of record' in both countries. I also used a random number generator to select my samples.

⁵⁷ This conjunctive search was necessary to rule out thousands of bridal articles that mentioned the tradition of Muslim and non-Muslim veiling at weddings. The universe of cases for this fifteen-year period in *The New York Times* was 1083 articles, while *The Times* published 753. Though 'Muslim' might be an alternative term used to associate veiling with Muslim women in particular, I cross-checked this conjunctive search and found comparable results: 1224 articles in the US; 984 articles in Britain.

⁵⁸ There was a total of 663 articles that mentioned the conjunctive phrases 'Muslim woman' or 'Muslim women' in *The Times (London)* and 746 in *The New York Times*.

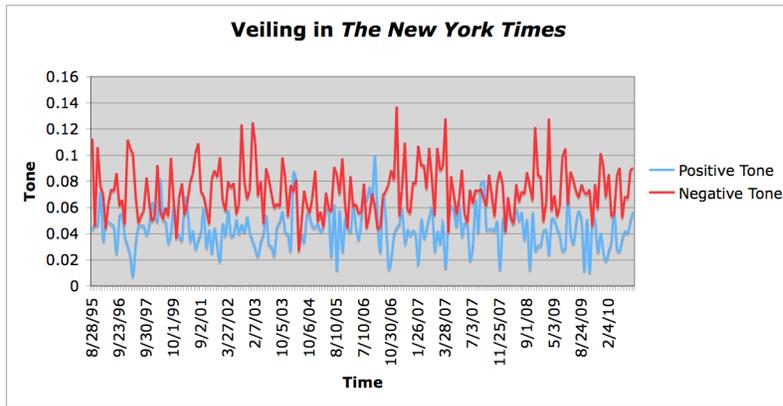


Figure 2.1: Veiling (US)

Because I am interested in the perception of tone taken as a whole over the past fifteen years, rather than particular fluctuations in intensity, the above figure should be interpreted as net negative tonal results. It quickly becomes evident that the media coverage of veiling in the New York Times can be objectively gauged as using negative tone to describe the practice.

The results for media coverage in Britain are remarkably similar. In a comparable analysis of media coverage of veiling in *The Times (London)* during the same fifteen year period, there are also robust negative results. See **Figure 2.2**.

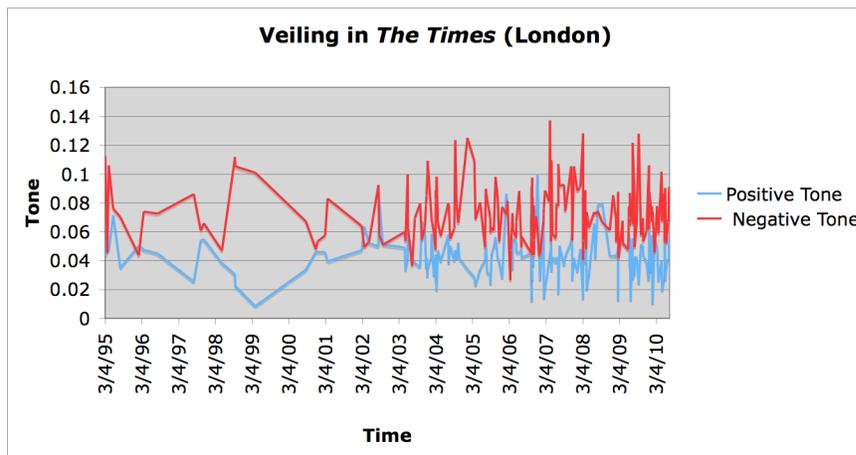


Figure 2.2: Veiling (UK)

Again, just as I mentioned that I am interested in the predominant tone of media coverage of veiling over the last fifteen years versus the fluctuation in tone, changes in frequency of coverage are also not central to my analysis. It is interesting to note that in the sample of British cases, even cross-checked against two additional random samples, the frequency of coverage picks up remarkably after 2004. The increased frequency is likely owed to a host of events in rapid succession that involved Muslims in Europe (i.e. the 2004 French *hijab* ban, the 2005 London attacks, the 2006 Jack Straw controversy, etc.). Yet, the fact that coverage does not increase dramatically after 2001 is slightly puzzling, given that Britain's concern over the US terror attacks was formative in the former's national security and foreign policy decisions.⁵⁹ Answering this puzzle is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it warrants further research. For our purposes, it is enough to notice the starkly negative net results.

I also ran samples of articles that had mentioned "Muslim woman" or "Muslim women" to speak to my respondents' particular concerns about how the 'Muslim woman' is constructed by the mainstream media's negative tone. Regardless of the mention of veiling, when Muslim women are portrayed by the media, they are portrayed using predominantly negative language in both countries' papers of record. **See Figures 2.3 and 2.4.**

⁵⁹ See coverage of former Prime Minister Tony Blair testifying that the September 11, 2001 attacks intensified the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, justifying Britain's involvement in supporting the US in the Iraq War: "Burns, John F. "Citing 9/11, Blair Defends Legacy at Iraq Inquiry" January 29, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/30/world/europe/30britain.html>.

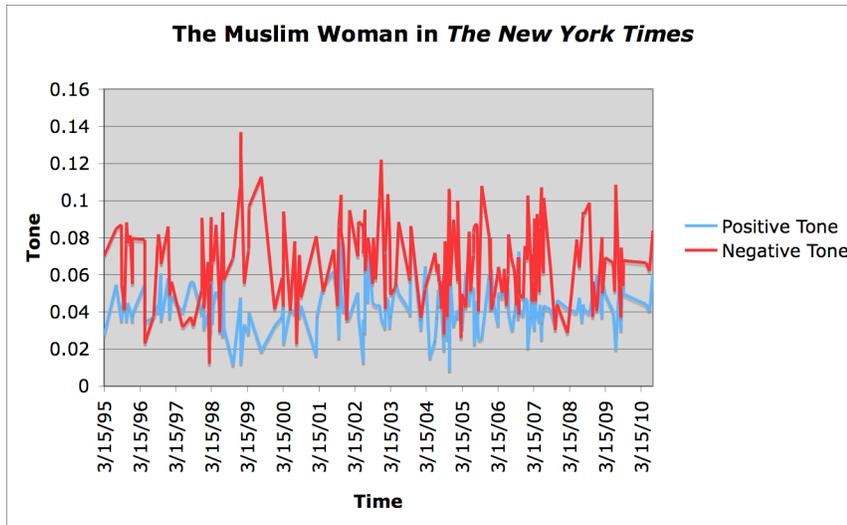


Figure 2.3: The Muslim Woman (US)

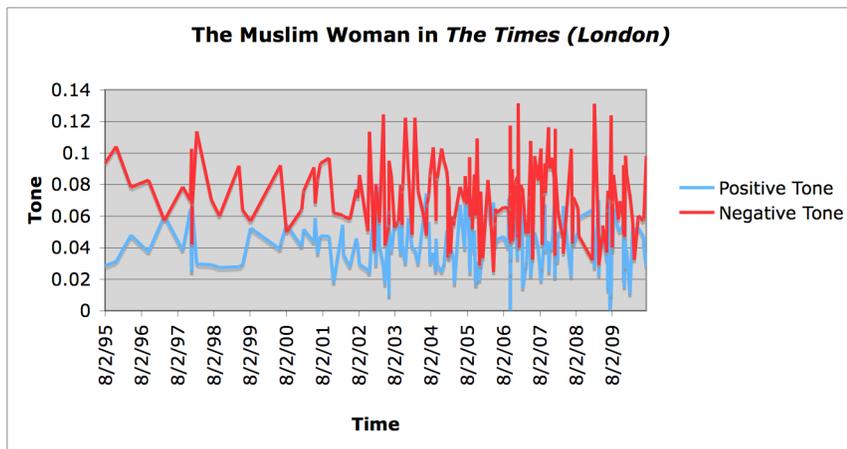


Figure 2.4: The Muslim Woman (UK)

In both of these diagrams, it is clear that the negative tone overwhelms the positive tone when media coverage discusses the Muslim woman. Again, in the British case, the frequency of coverage increases at a comparable time to the increased coverage of veiling in the mainstream media. But what is more interesting, for the purposes of this chapter, is that it shares the same net negative results as the American case.

III. ACTIVISTS AND ALTERNATIVE MEDIA FRAMES

Scholars of media framing argue that actors can battle for what is called ‘media standing’ if they want to challenge how the media frames certain individuals, groups or even ideas (Ferree et al 2002). Specifically, the terminology of ‘standing’ is borrowed from legal discourse to denote contested terrain, and scholars argue that media standing represents the *opportunity* for an actor to make a substantive comment and affect how the public imagines the topic in question. They argue: “standing both reflects and enhances acceptance as a player in a given policy issue and thus is a measure of achieved cultural power” (Ferree et al 2002: 87). Given that the previous section demonstrated that the mainstream media frames the Muslim woman and the practice of veiling using predominantly negatively toned language, this section demonstrates how activists react to what they term misrepresentation and battle for media standing to represent what they believe to be a more accurate representation of the Muslim woman.

Activists have emerged among second generation women in the Muslim communities of both countries who battle for standing by creating alternative media outlets, where they can portray the Muslim woman as a *subject* in her own representation. There are magazines, blogs, books, art exhibitions, radio interviews, and news websites that help construct this alternative image, yet it is the last of these outlets that I focus on the remainder of this section, because it is this outlet in particular that lends itself to a transnational activist community. While there is otherwise little collaboration between Muslim activists in Britain and the US, mostly due to self-perceived exceptionalism on both sides, the internet news sources bring women together from not only these two populations, but from countries all over the world as well. I look at the *Muslim Media Watch* and *Altmuslimah* websites to

demonstrate that Muslim women activists in both Britain and the US counterframe how the Muslim woman is represented in the media. Because of the unique nature of the online news outlets, these sources are able to use visual counterframes through photographs and images to an extent that print newspapers are unable to match. In this way, the news websites become a portal into other forms of activism as well, by publicizing and reviewing literary or artistic ventures.

1) *Muslimah Media Watch*

An American Muslim woman named Fatemeh Fakhraie founded Muslimah Media Watch (MMW) in 2007, a website dedicated to “critically analyzing images of Muslim women in global media and pop culture.”⁶⁰ Originally a one-woman operation, MMW was recently launched with a 21-person contributing team, made up of women from London to Los Angeles, as well as women from Cairo, Paris, Johannesburg and Toronto.⁶¹ The issues that are covered on the website range from political to social topics, but all contributors share the mission of the news outlet, which is stated on its website:

Muslimah Media Watch is a forum where we, as Muslim women, can critique how our images appear in the media and popular culture. Although we are of different nationalities, sects, races, etc., we have something important in common: we’re tired of seeing ourselves portrayed by the media in ways that are one-

⁶⁰ See Fakhraie’s personal website: <http://fatemehfakhraie.com/about/>.

⁶¹ See Uddin, Asma. “Muslimahs in the Media Do It Themselves” http://www.altmuslimah.com/a/b/a/muslimahs_in_the_media_do_it_themselves/. June 29, 2010. For a list of contributors, see: <http://muslimahmediawatch.org/about-2/mmw-contributors/>

dimensional and misleading. This is a space where, from a Muslim feminist perspective, we can speak up for ourselves. As Muslim feminists we aim to locate and critique misogyny, sexism, patriarchy, Islamophobia, racism, and xenophobia as they affect Muslim women.⁶²

The articles published on MMW adhere to this agenda to be critically analytical of how the Muslim woman appears in the mainstream media. There is a range of material, from essays on the misrepresentation of Muslim women to reviews publicizing work by Muslim women themselves trying to counter these negative representations with more positive portrayals.

Essays that critically analyze misrepresentation in the mainstream media are the most common pieces, such as a piece by American Muslim Noorain Khan, originally published at *Jezebel*, “Your Complete Guide to Bad *Burqa* Puns.”⁶³ Khan takes a tongue-in-cheek approach to deconstructing what she argues is the indolent overuse of the ‘veil pun,’ in media outlets around the world, ranging from “Behind the Veil (*The New York Times*)” to “The Many Faces Behind the Veil” to “Unveiling the Truth Behind Shariah (*Toronto Sun*).” She argues:

These veil puns pointedly remind us of the public's obsession, discomfort, and fascination with Muslim women and their sexuality. Even when headlining an article about a Muslim-majority country or about Islam

⁶² See “About Us”: <http://muslimahmediawatch.org/about-2/>.

⁶³ Jezebel.com is an online magazine that prides itself on providing alternative and cutting-edge news about women in the media. The website presumably plays on the reference of Jezebel to the Phoenician princess in Hebrew theology who was considered to be an evil woman in power. The name Jezebel is now often conflated with an evil woman, which is likely to be the misogynistic framing that a news outlet like Jezebel.com attempts to counter.

more generally, and not about Muslim women, the veil puns draw us back to what we should be thinking about—women who seem to exist in a sexual realm outside of the existing norms of Western society.⁶⁴

It could also be noted that all of the objects unveiled in these puns, when they are not explicitly referring to Muslim women, are good objects that should come out into the open—they *ought* to be unveiled (i.e. truth, policies, anxieties). These headlines potentially perpetuate the idea that only good can come from removing the restrictive veil.

The website also takes advantage of the ability to post many more visual images on the internet, opposed to the print media, and engages with the visual representation of the Muslim woman. While there are plenty of pieces analyzing misrepresentation in the mainstream media itself, MMW also engages with misrepresentation in other alternative outlets as well. One piece, by an American Muslim name publishing under the moniker ‘Diane,’ discusses the artwork of Shepard Fairey. Fairey is most commonly known for the iconic contemporary art image he created for President Barack Obama’s 2008 Presidential Campaign, the stylized stencil “Hope” portrait.⁶⁵ Fairey explains in his 1990 manifesto that his sticker campaign is an “experiment in phenomenology” which he cites Heidegger to describe as “the process of letting things manifest themselves.”⁶⁶ It is a guerilla campaign, meant to forcibly confront people to think about objects that they take for granted by putting such images on stickers, posters, and clothing without any written explanation.

⁶⁴ See Khan, Noorain. “Your Complete Guide to the Bad *Burqa* Pun”

⁶⁵ See Barton, Laura. “Hope—the image that is already an American classic” *The Guardian*. November 10, 2008.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/nov/10/barackobama-usa>

⁶⁶ See Fairey, Shepard. 1990. “Manifesto” <http://obeygiant.com/about>.

Diane analyzes images that Fairey recently began creating of Muslim women on his websites. See **Figures 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7**. In all of these figures, Diane admits that Fairey’s purpose might have been to challenge perceptions and motivate discourse, presumably by depicting veil-wearing women in images that are different from the mainstream’s oppressive or dangerous images. He may do this by creating the image of a woman looking seductive and allowing her hair to show from under the headscarf as in Figure 5, or perhaps by showing women looking determinedly into the audience as in Figures 6 and 7.



Figure 2.5: Fairey #1



Figure 2.6: Fairey #2



Figure 2.7: Fairey #3

Source: Shepard Fairey, original artist. Online gallery:

<http://obeygiant.com/industries>.

Still, Diane observes that when Fairey portrays other struggles, such as the Zapatista National Liberation Army, men and women are shown side by side as foot soldiers. In contrast, she argues, when Fairey depicts conflicts involving Muslims, only women are used and in ways in which they appear to be observers, rather than participants. Diane also notes that the *niqabi* woman with a flower in the end of her

rifle in Figure 7 concerns her because of its use of a weapon.⁶⁷ Though she admits the picture is more commanding than those where women are passive observers, she argues that associating the *niqab* with a garment under which weapons could be concealed plays into public stereotypes of Muslim women being concealed extremists.

MMW also publishes reviews and commentaries covering projects created by Muslim women themselves that also strive to counter media misrepresentations of the veil. Shelina Zahra Janmohamed's book *Love in a Headscarf* is just such an example. The young London-based writer published her first novel in 2009, which catalogues a young British Muslim woman's search for her ultimate companion. A reviewer at MMW writes of the book, "This is 'our' story—the story of every Muslim woman trying to negotiate between her faith and her culture, her upbringing and the world she lives in. It's like Shelina has scanned our minds and shone a light into the dark corners of our hearts, finding our deepest hopes and fears and praying for the same things."⁶⁸ The reviewer expresses her frustration at the lack of stories "about normal Muslims and way we live our lives" and explains that Janmohamed's choice to depict a Muslim woman's quest for love effectively normalizes the Muslim woman in the reader's mind.

Janmohamed herself explained in our interview her motivation for writing her novel:

There weren't then and there aren't now stories of
Muslim women told by themselves in the media.

⁶⁷ See "The Ladies in Red: Shepard Fairey's Propagand-art" <http://muslimahmediawatch.org/2010/04/the-ladies-in-red-shepard-faireys-propangand-art/>. April 29, 2010. It is unclear whether Fairey meant to reference the famous photography taken by Bernie Boston in 1967 of a young protester named George Harris placing a carnation in the gun barrels of soldiers during an anti-war demonstration; for more information on how iconic this image became see: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/17/AR2007031701300.html>.

⁶⁸ See El-Katatney, Ethar. "Love in a Headscarf" <http://muslimahmediawatch.org/2009/02/love-in-a-headscarf/>. February 26, 2009.

Something that really irritated me was that all the stories I saw in bookshops and online were misery memoirs—women with black veils over their faces who were kidnapped or sold into slavery or faced FGM and this kind of thing. And these things happen, but I faced those constantly. And I got quite upset that there weren't other stories about Muslim women and I just felt that if we wanted to change that, I would have to do that myself.

Janmohamed explains that the September 2001 attacks in the US changed her life as a Muslim woman because suddenly everyone believed they could talk *about* her because of her faith. She began writing a column in a local community paper, which eventually led to her own blog, called Spirit 21. In 2009, her blog was awarded the honors of Best Blog and Best Female Blog by the Annual Brass Crescent Awards;⁶⁹ her popularity among her readership led her to write an autobiographical account of a young Muslim woman's search for a mate. She admits her mission is quite simple in reality: "I thought that Muslim women themselves only ever get to be talked about by talking about oppression or rights... [but] actually [we could] just change our narrative by talking about something that's just very funny, personable and about day to day life." In contrast to the negative tone of media representations, however, these otherwise ordinary depictions appear to be rebellious counterframes.

In her book, Janmohamed discusses the construction of the British Muslim identity and how second generation women play a particular role in this process:

Muslim women were pushing forward the debate about our community's understanding of Islam. We were

⁶⁹ See award announcement: <http://www.brasscrescent.org/2007.php>.

questioning ‘how things were’ in the way that our faith was practiced. Our spirituality and faith were important to us, and we wanted to have our voices heard and our questions explored. We were confident that we would be the ones who could create real and positive change in the Muslim community and in extricating the faith of Islam from the cultures that had taken root in its practice. (Janmohamed 2009: 122)

She also turns to discussing the *hijab* itself, a topic that her chosen title forces her to address. She suggests that the symbolism of her *hijab* should not be lost on her companion:

The more I had to fight the preconceptions of what a Muslim woman who wore *hijab* should be like, the more I wanted a man who understood why I wore it and supported me... I wanted him to have a vision of a better future for our society, and to understand that the reason that I had chosen to wear *hijab* was a small contribution to that future. (Janmohamed 2009: 168)

In this way, Janmohamed explains her most personal dilemmas and shares with readers how she reasons her role as a Muslim woman in her community. In contrast to the images of weak and oppressed women in the mainstream media, often denoted by the same practice of wearing a headscarf that she embraces, she frames *hijabi* Muslim women as ordinary individuals who share the same anxieties about love and happiness as their non-Muslim peers.

The substance of the various pieces MMW publishes stays consistent: the mainstream media’s unsophisticated portrayal of the Muslim woman as perpetually

veiled and thus submissive or dangerous fails to adequately communicate the diversity within Muslim women's experiences. The news website has gathered an international contributing staff, that has in turn drawn an international audience of Muslim women who agree with this message.

2) *Altmuslimah*

Altmuslimah also gathers this international community, evidenced by its contributors and readership. In her introductory letter published on the website at its inauguration in 2009, the founder, Asma Uddin, explains that she believes the media has the power to shape public opinion: "With the media constantly spewing out images of oppressed Muslim women and angry Muslim men, the world looks on with both fascination and disgust. The Muslim gender dynamic – supposedly a singular, unchanging construct – has become a spectacle for everyone to gawk at, comment on, and ultimately use to ridicule the larger Muslim community."⁷⁰ In order to shape public opinion in the favor of Muslim women, Altmuslimah publishes pieces similar to MMW—critical essays and public reviews and commentaries that counterframe the mainstream media's negative portrayal of the Muslim woman with alternative positive frames. Though the website does draw international audiences, Uddin admits in an interview that it is primarily targeting the American Muslim audience. She says that the "vast majority of contributors are second generation" who are interested in sharing their experiences with other individuals who are reconciling their religious and American identities.

Altmuslimah is also aware of the visual advantage it can enjoy over many print mainstream outlets. One of its campaigns is called the Photographic Campaign and solicits photographs from its audience "aimed at providing an alternative to the

⁷⁰ See Uddin 2009: <http://www.altmuslimah.com/a/b/a/2947/>.

dominant media image of oppressed Muslim women and angry Muslim men.”⁷¹ The campaign has received endorsements from notable academics who study Muslim politics, including Louise Cainkar and Mona Eltahawy. On one hand, Cainkar connects the idea of stereotyping Muslim women to a larger global culture of distrust: “As long as it remains socially acceptable to portray Muslims in these negative and deceptive ways, our societies will be unable to move forward: to step up and out of the politics of hatred.”⁷² On the other hand, Eltahawy explains how stereotypes effectively silent women: “Angry Bearded Muslim Man is the favorite...His female counterpart is Covered in Black Muslim Woman. She’s seen, never heard. Visible only in her invisibility under that black chador, *burqa*, face veil, etc.”⁷³ Both scholars give their approval for a media project that tries to counterframe stereotypes with positive images of women.

One of the photographers associated with the Photographic Campaign is Sadaf Syed. Syed is an American Muslim woman who published a book of photo-essays called *iCover: a day in the life of an American Muslim COVERed girl*. She traveled around the country taking photographs of American Muslim women living their lives, illustrating veiled women in scenes that are meant to defy public expectations of veiled women as oppressed, submissive and hidden from the public spotlight. A sample of the photos below depicts a woman boxer, surfer, high school Homecoming Queen, and truck driver. **See Figures 2.8, 2.9, 2.10 and 2.11.**⁷⁴

⁷¹ See call for photographs, July 2, 2009: <http://www.altmuslimah.com/a/b/b/3165/>.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Source—Photographs taken from: Sadaf Syed. 2010. *iCover: a Day in the Life of a Muslim-American COVERed Girl*. USA: iCreate Publishing.



Figure 2.8: Boxer



Figure 2.9: Surfer



Figure 2.10: Queen



Figure 2.11: Truck Driver

Another American Muslim campaign profiled on Altmuslimah is the production called *The Hijabi Monologues (THM)*. In 2009, Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah, Zeenat Rahman, and Daniel Morrison published a set of stories narrated by American Muslim women meant to be performed on stage by women wearing the *hijab*; they decided to make the title of the production a play on Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*. One of the 12 women performers writes an essay about the play, posted on Altmuslimah (in addition to other media outlets), that notes the inverse relationship between the two productions: “Unlike *The Vagina Monologues*, which brought private

subject matter into public discourse, *Hijabi Monologues* is actually taking the *hijab* from the public news and media discourse back into women's personal lives."⁷⁵ The performer says "*Hijabi Monologues* was born of a joint desire to take the Muslim woman out of the public and make her private, and to decentralize the *hijab* as the focus of Western popular discourse about Muslim women."⁷⁶

The play consists of 12 narratives, each performed by a young woman wearing *hijab*. While the performers wear the headscarf, none of the stories actually discuss the topic and instead focus on the diversity of stories that women who happen to wear *hijab* can encounter. In Ullah's own words, she believes that "stories have the potential to create a better understanding of our lives, generating empathy and a sense of shared humanity, while at the same time describing a unique experience."⁷⁷ She uses the *hijab* as a physical marker of difference, only to make clear that the characters are each Muslim. Stories address a range of topics, from teenage pregnancy to a daughter watching her father arrested on charges of national security to a mother dealing with the accidental death of her son. Like *Love in a Headscarf*, these stories are meant to normalize the image of the Muslim woman as just another type of woman who experiences heartbreak and joy similar to her non-Muslim peers.

Before a performance in Washington, D.C., Ullah shared a few words with the audience where she explained that the idea for the play was born from multiple conversations she used to have with her white, male classmate, Morrison, when they were both masters students in the Middle Eastern Studies department at the University of Chicago. She recounts that Morrison was so impressed by the seeming indefinite

⁷⁵ See Alhassen, May. "From an expression of identity to a transformative movement" November 4, 2009. <http://www.altmuslimah.com/a/b/revva/3385/>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ See Ullah, Sahar. "The Hjiabi Monologues Resonates Through the Power of Storytelling." January 6, 2009. <http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=24615&lan=en&sid=1&sp=0>

amount of stories she shared about being an American Muslim women who wears the headscarf, that he suggested she write a collection of stories representing such diverse perspectives. Morrison stayed committed to the idea and pushed her to move forward, she remembers in front of the audience.

Asma Uddin would agree with the play's objective to represent diversity. In a piece on media and Islam published on Altmuslimah, she argues: "a media alternative is needed – one that explores gender in Islam in all of its nuance and complexity rather than demonizing or simplifying it. Because media distortion happens both through biased reporting and exaggerated, selective images, the counter-response must be similarly multifaceted."⁷⁸ Though Altmuslimah's entire staff is made of American Muslims, and Uddin admits that her motivation for founding the news website was to provide a unique space for second generation American Muslims to discuss issues concerning both gender and Islam, the coverage and range of topics are extensively international.⁷⁹ While MMW's has assembled a more international staff, the news that both sites publish is consistently transnational in substance.

While both MMW and Altmuslimah are aware that their audiences are not as broad as the mainstream media's audience, they reason that they may draw individuals who are curious about Islam and attempting to research more information about Muslim women. More importantly, however, activists believe that frames that depict Muslim women as weak or extreme individuals need to be counterframed to help

⁷⁸ See Uddin, Asma. "The media's role in demonizing Muslim men and women" September 11, 2009. <http://www.altmuslimah.com/a/b/b/3283/>.

⁷⁹ For instance, the front page of Altmuslimah's 'Society and Politics' page includes articles on Malawi (see Hamid, Zarin. "Malawi plans a ban on polygamy." May 12, 2010. <http://www.altmuslimah.com/a/b/spa/3854/>), Pakistan (see Orne, Kate. "The victims of Pakistan's sex trade" July 16, 2010. <http://www.altmuslimah.com/a/b/spa/3854/>), Saudi Arabia (see Faruqui, Fahad. "Saudi Arabia's cruel marriage laws" April 26, 2010), in addition to articles about Britain, France, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Egypt.

Muslims as well. Uddin argues that the communal element to this form of activism has its own intrinsic worth:

Looking inward is about reflecting on our individual spiritual cores – the place where we, in our quiet moments, wonder about our identity vis-à-vis the world, the part of us that cowers under the spotlight. While putting on a façade of defiance, our spirituality is often in a state of flux...Recognizing that our spiritual growth is often a lonely, confusing process, it is one of Altmuslimah's goals to provide a space where the process can be shared with others.⁸⁰

Though the public misrepresentation of the Muslim woman frustrates activists who believe that such images shape public opinion against Muslim women, these alternative news sources infiltrate the cluster of sources that portray Muslim women in public. Such activists for media standing define their own success—by simply existing, these sources prove the diversity of Muslim women's voices.

IV. CONCLUSION

Though the Muslim populations of Britain and the US stand in stark contrast to one another on levels of education, employment and other socio-economic indicators, these differences do not seem to affect the mainstream media's representation of the Muslim woman as either oppressed or dangerous. In order to distinguish the Muslim woman, the media does not refer to class or ethnic origin markers (except, perhaps, for the racialization that depicts Muslims as 'brown' individuals from the Middle East or

⁸⁰ See Uddin, Asma. "Introducing Altmuslimah: Exploring both sides of the gender divide" March, 8, 2009.. <http://www.altmuslimah.com/a/b/a/2947/>.

South Asia). Instead, it relies on the visual marker of the veil, in any of its derivations. Both countries' mainstream media reduce the Muslim woman to this single image, effectively erasing the diversity that exists among Muslim women in reality. Activists believe this objectification denies them voice in their own representation, or media standing, and misrepresents the Muslim woman as indeed oppressed or dangerous. In response, activists battle to obtain better standing and counterframe how the public thinks of the Muslim woman by creating alternative news outlets. They take advantage of new technology, predominantly the internet, to create a transnational community of activists who all have the same goal: to reclaim Islam by diversifying the representation of the Muslim woman in the media and prove that the Muslim woman can be a strong voice in constructing the her own identity in the West.

In addition to the media's representation of the Muslim woman that portrays her as inevitably weak and oppressed, Muslim women also battle against intracommunal misogynistic interpretations of the Muslim woman's role in relation to Muslim men. Though this behavior is often justified with religious doctrine on gender relations, Muslim women activists take their battle for standing into the private sphere and argue that sexist behavior, in fact, violates Islamic teachings. In the next chapter, I describe how Muslim women activists in both countries also fight to reclaim Islam in the private sphere of their own faith communities.

CHAPTER 3

REINTERPRETIVE ACTIVISM: HOW WOMEN REFRAME ISLAM'S POSITION ON GENDER VIOLENCE

The gender-justice activism that emerges among second generation Muslim women in Britain and the United States not only challenges misogynistic representations of the Muslim woman in the public sphere, but it also confronts misogynistic behavior within the private sphere of their own Muslim communities. While activists address a variety of intracommunal issues, such as inheritance rights and custody conflicts, the most urgent struggle emerges against the prominence of domestic violence in both countries' communities. An American study estimates physical violence in 10% of American Muslim homes, with rates of verbal and emotional abuse reaching as high as 50%.⁸¹ British research on the British Muslim community reports that 'honor killings,' murders committed in the name of family honor when a female allegedly practices immoral behavior, occur most visibly in Islamic Asian or Middle Eastern immigrant communities.⁸² While domestic violence is still a prevalent concern in mainstream British and American society, the urgency of violence in their Muslim communities is compounded by two factors: first, female victims are reluctant to 'air the community's dirty laundry' because fellow community members argue that such negative publicity only promotes the hostility that Muslims face in both Britain and the United States;⁸³ second, community members use Islamic

⁸¹ See Sharifa Alkhateeb's 1998 study on violence in the Muslim American community.

⁸² See CEDAW (2003) report, "Violence Against Women in the UK" (Purna Sen, Cathy Humphreys and Liz Kelly).

⁸³ See <http://muslimmatters.org/2008/06/04/airing-dirty-polygamous-laundry/>.

interpretations of religious scriptures to justify the violence against women.

In response to these challenges and the prevalence of violence in the British and American Muslim communities, gender-justice activists engage in what I call ‘re-interpretive activism,’ a project that articulates an alternative interpretation of Islam that specifically prohibits domestic violence in the Muslim home. At the heart of this re-interpretation is the Islamic principle of *ijtihad*, a hermeneutic strategy that obliges critical thinking and individual reasoning of Islamic texts. Both scholars and second generation activists articulate a version of Islam that counters the *androcentric*, *primocentric* account that prevails among first generation immigrant Muslims and is often employed to excuse incidents of violence. While activists argue that their alternative version primarily stresses a distinction between concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘religion,’ I will interrogate their use of ‘culture’ and demonstrate that activists would gain more analytical traction from differentiating between ‘tradition’ and religion instead.

Through a combination of original interview data and secondary source analysis, I demonstrate that activists move their efforts to construct a *new egalitarian Muslim identity* into the private sphere of both countries. In section one, I contend that they employ *framing theory* in their reinterpretation of Islamic teachings to rearticulate Islam’s position on gender violence to fellow Muslims. In section two, I explain how they engage in *diagnostic* framing to identify the problem at the root of the pervasive violence: the androcentric, primocentric account of Islam that prevails in the community. Next, in section three, I detail how they engage in *prognostic* framing to find a solution to domestic violence. I argue that they use a hermeneutic strategy to argue that women’s rights ought to be protected within an Islamic framework, as an alternative to deriving their rights from Western secular state-based models that

protect women from domestic violence. I conclude in section four by demonstrating how activists are beginning to apply the principle of *ijtihad* (critical reasoning)—and their resulting distinction between ‘culture’ and religion—to additional intracommunal issues, such as marriage norms in the diaspora.

I. FRAMING THEORY

This reinterpetive strategy that aims to alter people’s associations between Islam and gender violence relies on a process called framing, where activists engage in the production of meaning and construct so-called ‘frames’ which serve as schemata of interpretation for their gender-justice struggles. As is discussed in the previous two chapters, Benford and Snow (2000) explain that these frames are created when activists “negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change” (615). My findings show that gender-justice activists in both countries generate a common central frame to facilitate their reinterpetive activism at the local community level: *Islam prohibits domestic violence*.

While the previous chapter connected Benford and Snow’s theory of framing with Ferree et al.’s theory of media standing to demonstrate that the media can create social meaning through what is specifically called media framing, this chapter focuses on more general framing theory that argues activists can also generate social meaning simply through the ways they identify and propose solutions to social problems. There are two core framing tasks, in particular, that apply to my respondents’ frames in their reinterpetive activism: *diagnostic framing*, which identifies the problem and assigns blame or responsibility, and *prognostic framing*, which articulates the solution

to the problem.⁸⁴ The *diagnostic frame* identifies the problem as the androcentric, primocentric account of Islam that condones domestic violence. Activists believe that the first generation is generally unable to differentiate between customary practices from their sending countries and true religious doctrine; the second generation argues that this effectively leads to a version of Islam that uses the perspective of the male first generation Muslim as a point of reference in deciding proper Islamic teachings.

The *prognostic frame* articulates a solution to the problem that involves reinterpreting Islam according to the original texts. This hermeneutic strategy requires critical thinking to reveal that androcentric, primocentric interpretations of Islam contradict the religion's teachings on women's rights. Activists argue that the solution to domestic violence in the Muslim community resides within a 'purist' Islamic framework, because they believe that Islam grants women the rights to a peaceful family existence. This approach neutralizes the need to rely on the secular state-based rights' framework that outlaws domestic violence in both Britain and the US.

There are three interactive and discursive processes that help generate the central frame that says Islam does not allow domestic violence. The first two, frame articulation and counterframing, also appear in representative activist efforts discussed in chapter two. Likewise, in the case of reinterpetive activism, the discursive process of *frame articulation* offers a novel combination of ideas "spliced together and articulated, such that a new angle of vision, vantage point, and/or interpretation is provided" (623). My respondents articulate that such a frame necessitates drawing a distinction between the concepts of culture and religion, a distinction which will be further interrogated below. Instead of taking traditional practices for granted and

⁸⁴ The third core task, motivational framing, involves a 'call to arms' and is less relevant to my research because none of these activists admit to being part of a larger, collective 'movement' as of yet.

conflating them with religious practices, activists look to Islamic texts and the Prophetic tradition to clarify Islam's stance against domestic violence. Consequently, the patriarchal practices that condone such violence and migrate with the immigrant Muslim community are framed as anti-Muslim.

Second, constructing *counterframes* also play an important role in reinterpetive activism, particularly in understanding how vigorously frames are contested by fellow community members. This opposition, in turn, further influences gender-justice activists' frames. Scholars and activists argue that males often counterframe domestic violence in Islam by exploiting religious interpretations that superficially appear to justify domestic violence. This exploitative interpretation employs verses out of context that allegedly grant men authority over women and creates a counterframe with which gender-justice activists must engage. Some victims of domestic violence, in accepting such inaccurate religious interpretations, believe that speaking out against such violence will go against their faith. Activists call this type of manipulation 'spiritual abuse' (implicitly comparing it to physical and emotional abuse) and contest the frame that Islam allows domestic violence.

While activism in the public and private spheres employs processes of both frame articulation and counterframing, I argue that reinterpetive activism employs an additional and distinct framing process called *frame transformation*. This process is used to "[change] old understandings and meanings and/or [generate] new ones" (Benford and Snow 2000: 625), enabling activists to transform the frame that Islam prohibits domestic violence for use in other gender disputes in the communities. My findings demonstrate that they employ the same critical thinking mechanism called *ijtihad* to apply the same reinterpetive strategy that differentiates between cultural and religious practices. I conclude by presenting preliminary evidence that activists are

disproportionately more likely that the average citizen in either country to pursue intermarriage across ethnic and racial groups. I suggest this behavior demonstrates that the second generation, in both countries, follows a similar reinterpetive strategy that frames first generation elders' tendency towards endogamous marriage as simply an attempt at cultural preservation, rather than a practice endorsed by an Islamic understanding of marriage. In the sections that follow, I will demonstrate how second generation gender-justice activists in both countries employ a discursive practice to facilitate their reinterpetive activism at the local community level that framing theory helps us understand.

II. DIAGNOSTIC FRAMING

Activists argue that violence committed against women violates Qur'anic principles of gender-justice and peaceful family relations, yet such violence still pervades both British and American Muslim communities, as described above. Second generation activists recurrently blame this persistent violence on the first generation immigrant Muslim community's inability to distinguish between the concepts of *culture* and *religion*. They find their parents and other community elders incapable of separating their understanding of Islamic teachings from the cultural lens through which they learned their religion in their country of origin. The problem with conflating these ideas, activists argue, is the fact that cultural interpretations often stray far from authentic Islamic tenets. As chapter one explains, this project to reclaim Islam in the West exists against the larger backdrop of a multiculturalist political project in both countries--that is, both Britain and the United States are trying to manage the increasing diversity of what they call *cultural communities*. My respondents, however, argue that defining the Muslim culture according to the

androcentric, primocentric account offered by first generation male immigrants excludes their experience as second generation British and American Muslim women. In this sense, they articulate culture as a relative frame that decides beliefs according to the country in which individuals were born and socialized, whereas religion is a universal frame that derives its beliefs from common scripture.

A. Frame Articulation: Culture vs. Religion

My findings show that respondents who claim that *culture* is at fault for misogynistic interpretations of Islam in fact trace their heritage back to a wide span of countries, ranging from Somalia to Lebanon to Bangladesh. Since we know that these countries surely do not share one singular culture, the concept of culture as it is popularly conceived deserves some interrogation. The conceptualization of culture has challenged a number of disciplines, but political science in particular struggles with the idea of culture as a heuristic mechanism for social practices and political preferences (Kymlicka 2000, 1996, 1995; Laitin and Wildavsky 1988).

As discussed in the introduction, William Kymlicka, the most prominent multicultural theorist, thinks of culture as a “context of choice” that “provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres” (Kymlicka 1995: 76). According to this definition, cultural group membership can signal how members see the world and, consequently, how they not only determine their interests, but also translate these interests into behavior.

Aaron Wildavsky (1987) would likely agree with Kymlicka, as he defines culture as “shared values legitimizing social practices” (Wildavsky 1987: 6). His version of cultural theory also argues that culture serves the role of ‘context,’ in

helping individuals determine what they favor, as well as what they stand against. David Laitin (1988) challenges Wildavsky for failing to see the difference between culture and political preferences. He argues that people can stand for or against very different political ideas within the same culture, just as people from different cultures may align similarly. Instead, he sees culture not as values upheld, but agrees with Thomas Metzger (1977) who sees culture as “points of concern that are debated” (Laitin 1987: 589). Culture, in Laitin’s estimation, will not tell you what to believe, but it will decide what issues are worth discussion.

Yet Laitin goes on to argue that “to share a culture is to share a language or religion or historiography,” all the while admitting that it is rare for these systems to coincide perfectly with large societies (Laitin 1987: 591). A religion such as Islam, however, that not only spans numerous countries and regions of the world, but also spans multiple generations through migration, might also challenge the cultural classification. In this case of second generation Muslim women, there is clearly tension between the cultural identity they associate with their parents and the religious identity they construct for themselves in the West—yet both are often casually grouped together into the Muslim identity.

Activists described a common narrative, in which they felt disillusioned with their “parents’ Islam” when they discovered that certain aspects actually contradicted Islamic teachings. They discovered this disconnect through reading texts in English translation, aided greatly by resources on the internet and Qur’anic study circles or community seminars at local mosques. It usually only took one conflict within the home--often over whether the Qur’an prohibited female education or mandated wearing the *hijab*--to propel these activists down a path of inquiry, upon which they discovered more interpretations at odds with the Islam they felt their parents endorsed.

It should be noted that activists apply the term ‘culture’ in two different, but not wholly unrelated, ways. In one respect culture is used to label what might otherwise be considered ethnic groups, along the lines of Laitin’s definition. This usage predominantly appears when activists are frustrated with the racialization of Islam, which conflates ethnic groups from regions with a considerable population of Muslims with the religious group itself (e.g. South Asians, Middle Easterners, etc.). The second form of usage seems to identify practices or behavior, along the lines of Wildavsky’s definition, that might otherwise be called ‘tradition.’ While this idea is further explored below, it is important to note that these attributes usually refer to customs with long historical grounding in the same regions that are connected to the racialization of Islam in the West. Thus, certain traditions from first generation immigrants’ sending countries are often interpreted as Muslim behavior in the West, which activists misleadingly ascribe to their parents’ ‘culture.’

B. Frame Articulation: Domestic Violence is a Problem

Activists’ diagnostic framing has identified domestic violence as a serious problem that both British Muslim and American Muslim communities must tackle, often because women are charged with hiding the community’s negative features from the public spotlight. In this section, I examine Muslim domestic violence activism in each country to demonstrate that both: a) argue against violence from within an Islamic framework, because they see the secular state-based rights framework as inadequate, and b) promote the same conceptual distinction between culture and religion to explain that Islamic teachings condemn domestic violence.

The following sections will demonstrate that both countries’ activists offer an alternative to the secular state-based rights framework because of each state’s failure to exhibit adequate political will to protect women from violence. On the one hand,

British activists suggest that the British state discriminates against Muslim women's needs in particular, while still supporting Asian women's rights organizations. On the other hand, American activists seem to react to the American state's indiscriminate failure to support (Muslim and non-Muslim) activists fighting violence against women.

1) Domestic Violence in Britain

While both countries deal with more conventional examples of domestic violence that include battery and abuse in the home, British Muslim activists argue that forced marriages should be considered examples of domestic violence as well. Forced marriage refers to a marriage that is arranged for either a man or woman without his or her consent and against either party's free will (Phillips and Dustin 2004). It has emerged as a social problem that is far more salient in Britain than the United States, due to each country's different experiences with historical immigration patterns. The British Muslim population draws heavily from rural communities in Pakistan and post-conflict refugee populations from Bangladesh--the two countries of origin with the highest involvement in British forced marriages. Some families from these two populations force their daughters to marry males from their country of origin to preserve cultural expectations and prevent daughters from submitting to the 'ways of the West.' These marriages are distinct from family reunification measures, which allow migrants to bring spouses into Britain, because the young woman is forced to marry against her will or held hostage until she concedes. A large number of cases involve consanguineous marriages with cousins from the rural communities and villages that first generation immigrants left to migrate to Britain; often relatives in the immigrants' countries of origin expect the migrant to provide for more family members' settlement abroad, which is most easily arranged through marriage with

young female relatives.

While the majority of forced marriage cases do involve families from South Asian communities, primarily Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, activists resent the conflation between what they stress is a regional South Asian cultural practice with the Muslim tradition. They point out that forced marriage is also a problem in Hindu and Sikh families, two other religions that are represented on the subcontinent. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, they argue, make up the vast majority of the British South Asian population, which is why they also comprise the majority of forced marriage cases.

In 2005, Britain created the Forced Marriage Unit, a joint initiative between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office to help victims of forced marriage find civil remedies to their predicaments. In 2009 the FMU reported that it gave advice or support to 1682 cases, 86% of which involved females as the primary victim, while 14% involved males.⁸⁵ The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 enables family courts to issue forced marriage protection orders to prevent forced marriages from occurring, or remove women from marriages into which they have already been forced.⁸⁶ These orders take proactive measures to prevent victims from being taken abroad, such as confiscating passports, as well as reactive measures that involve demanding the disclosure of whereabouts once an individual has already been taken abroad, and counseling support once victims return to Britain. In the legislation's first year alone, 86 orders were issued, exceeding the estimate of 50 orders.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/when-things-go-wrong/forced-marriage/>

⁸⁶ See Forced Marriage Protection Orders, <http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/cms/14490.htm>.

⁸⁷ <http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease251109a.htm>

Amrit Wilson's (2007) analysis of forced marriage related legislation in Britain, however, suggests that such measures are more representative of the state's marginalization of minority communities than its commitment to prevent violence. While the state claims to have minority women's interests in mind by cracking down on coerced marriages to overseas spouses, Wilson argues that it has simultaneously reduced funds allocated to minority women's refuges, which are necessary to provide shelter to women who experience violence. The state has also implemented legislation that requires spouses to file an official complaint against their families if they want their spouses deported back to their country of origin. Wilson argues these two measures demonstrate the state's lack of familiarity with the support network that Muslim victims of domestic violence need when exiting violent relationships.

The British state has tried different legal interventions to enforce immigration regulations that would discourage forced marriages. Most prominently, the state has increased the age of entry for non-EU spouses, along with an increase in the age required to sponsor such spouses. These state attempts are also criticized for their marginalization of minority communities. Gangoli and Chantler (2009), for example, argue that it is problematic for the British state to enforce legislation that relies on dubious research connecting increased age, maturity and resistance to forced marriage. Phillips and Dustin (2004) also criticize such legislation for effectively promoting an immigration regulation regime that equates all overseas marriages with forced marriages, discriminating against minority citizens and pronouncing judgments on their ability to make sound decisions in marriage.

The activists I interviewed shared this criticism of the state's efforts to prevent violence in the Muslim community. The An-nisa Society, one of the most prominent Muslim women's organizations in Britain, was established in London in 1985 by a

group of British Muslim second and third-generation women who were tired of being marginalized by local authorities. Whereas the anti-racist movement of the 1970s resulted in the Race Relations Act of 1976, this legislation prevented discrimination primarily on racial and ethnic grounds. Even its successor, the Race Relations Act of 2000, which requires public institutions to demonstrate that their anti-discriminatory measures have been effective, primarily addressed racial and ethnic groups. Religious groups were not recognized in British anti-discrimination legislation until 2003, when a European Commission directive outlawed religious discrimination in employment, and then later with the Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006 (Modood 2006: 42-44).

Before these recent developments, however, Muslim women's groups felt that the state failed to address their needs as religious women, by only addressing racial and ethnic group needs. While neoconservative economic policies and a conservative government in the 1980s contributed to the decline of women's rights organizations across all communities (Elman 2003), Muslim women felt especially marginalized because even the remaining concern for women's safety focused on Asian group needs only. One of the An-nisa Society's founders explained how the group formed to represent the specific needs of Muslim women in particular:

When we set up, it was a group of us, 2nd and 3rd generation [women] from various different backgrounds and we decided that we were British and Muslim...and we want to have our needs met as such... First thing we wanted to do was set up a nursery because a lot of us were mothers...I was working and I wanted my children to go somewhere where they could have faith based

care. So we applied to the local council and we were shocked at how we were treated... They came down on us like a ton of bricks, they said if we already have an Asian nursery, we can't have a Muslim nursery. And they kept on addressing us as Asian women, and we said 'we're not Asian, we're Muslim from different backgrounds.' They kept on saying it's religious, we don't fund religious things...we had to really fight and we didn't get the funding.

Beyond childcare, this organization began addressing broader social service issues that disproportionately affect women and children in the Muslim community--violence, housing, the foster care system, etc.

The An-nisa Society continues to experience difficulty in receiving funding from the state. Leaders argue that the state's treatment of religion has evolved from inattention to a misguided focus on the Muslim community for security concerns (this evolution in the state's treatment of religion will be discussed in detail in chapter five). While they argue that some other religious organizations have begun ostensibly agreeing with the government's counterterrorism strategy to procure funding in a political climate that prioritizes security issues, the An-nisa Society has vocalized a strong stance against the Preventing Violent Extremism fund (an initiative that will also be discussed in detail in chapter five). The group published a scathing report of the PVE's blatant disregard for the genuine problems that ail Muslim women and children in British society (i.e. poverty, violence, and limited educational and employment opportunities) and subsequently feels that the state has reacted

defensively to the report's allegations, instead of engaging with its criticisms.⁸⁸

This organization appeals to the distinction between culture and religion and argues that it is necessary to make any progress in meeting Muslim women's needs. One of the founders described two examples that illustrate how the state's conflation of these two concepts hurts Muslim women in the process:

It was very crude the way they were delivering the needs of these communities. For example, *halal* food in hospitals. We've been banging our heads against the walls for years saying 'it is not about curry!'... we spoke to so many Muslim patients in hospitals who said 'they keep on giving us curry!'... and the point is, even if you're from the subcontinent, you don't necessarily want curry...when you've just had a stomach operation, that's not what we'd have at home. On the subcontinent when you've been ill, you usually get bland foods and soups and what have you. It was just fixed in their minds that *halal* is Asian, therefore it's spicy and curry... then you have a Bosnian woman saying she doesn't eat curry,

⁸⁸ The author attended a speech given at the London School of Economics and Political Science on February 25, 2009 by Hazel Blears, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government at the time, in which she defended the PVE fund against the report's allegations. See the report, "Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) & the Prevent Strategy—A Muslim Response" at: http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:y_VyxWV9tHkJ:www.an-nisa.org/downloads/Responses_to_Prevent_Report_.pdf+an-nisa+society+preventing+violent+extremism&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESjExgcUnu8rdvKs_D3v9iv09VESRvYQ0ZPCbwpj_E3XACDOZj3KxAFJqnwZ-nNGIn0H9cBjKdDkN5yIfg_YvfmJFInzctPxHoH3Hu3eQFrSeLBjodErZ5VMEVqOPB0VSQInz05t&sig=AHIEtbQZVJNnUI-ZRIgPBZr6lncFD4lIMA.

but when she goes to a hospital and asks for halal, that's what they get. So we had to say, it's like Kosher. You can you have shepherd's pie that is *halal* and you can have curry that's not *halal*.

You can't use anti-racist strategies to address Islamophobia, you can't just lump them together...so for example, you have an Asian housing association and what you're doing is lumping together Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs together... I used to be in a group for housing for the Asian elderly...[and] you've got these 3 different religions of people who come here, primarily, and you're saying that they can live together, very closely in a home, sharing a lot of the area, [even though] Muslims might object to statues of gods being there, Hindus might object to Muslims eating meat, and even some Hindus that do eat meat might eat pork, which Muslims might object to, all sorts of things like that.... Also, in the Muslim community, we have a lot of marriages between ethnic groups. Would you allow a partner from a different background who might be white (but Muslim) in this housing area? No. So there's all these [problems].

When this activist voices frustration with the state's conflation of a religious identity with a cultural identity, culture in this case refers to ethnic groups. The British state racializes Islam by equating Muslims with all 'Asians,' though the latter group also

includes Hindu and Sikh individuals.

Culture is also used to label the traditions deemed popular in the regions from which these ethnic groups migrate. A popular seminar that the organization hosts called “Family Tyranny” questions the role of the Muslim family and the influence that certain cultural norms may play in enabling domestic violence, forced marriages, and parental tyranny. The seminar aims to teach participants about the “exploitation of religion in the perpetuation of violence in the Muslim family.” One of the founders of this organization explains how important it is to clarify that Islam and cultural norms are distinct concepts:

I think Islam is very misrepresented and I hate it being synonymous with being anti-women... I wouldn't follow it if I thought it was anti-women, because I'm really pro-women! ... I think there's been a number of cultural practices that we've taken on in our communities which people are practicing all sorts of things that they think [are] Islamic, but they're actually not based on Islam at all.

In its efforts to spell out the distinction, in the hopes of preventing violence in Muslim homes, the organization continuously emphasizes the Islamic model of family relations that orders partners to think of each other as complementary garments. This model also encourages fathers to take an active part in family raising, ideally encouraging more holistic households with less traditional gender dynamics, and is an example of prognostic framing (which is discussed further in the latter half of this chapter).

Activists underline this distinction between misogynistic traditional practices

and egalitarian religious teachings by engaging in a reinterpetive strategy that derives Islam's position against violence from Islamic texts themselves. A student activist from London elaborated on a *hadith* that explains forced marriages are un-Islamic:

Sexual inequality does exist in our community but that's because it has to do with cultural Islam... Islam does not allow you to do forced marriage. There's this one case where a woman came to the Prophet and said she's unhappy with the man she was married to and the marriage was forced upon her. And the Prophet said 'your marriage is null and void because it was forced upon you.'

By referring to *hadith* that explain Islam's position against forced marriages, activists engage in a reinterpetive project to educate fellow Muslims about gender-justice. Activists appeal to the prohibitions against such violence within the Islamic framework, instead of appealing to British laws that have emerged against forced marriage.

Another British Muslim women's organization also underlines the distinction between tradition and religion to emphasize Islam's prohibitive position on coerced marriage. The Doli Project (a reference to the traditional chair used to carry South Asian brides into a wedding ceremony) in Birmingham began as an immigrant counseling service, but leaders quickly realized that the vast majority of young women who came to them seeking advice and support were victims of forced marriage. One 41 year old social worker who worked with the project explained that their strategy was to convince victims that coerced marriage violated Islamic principles, so they were not being 'bad Muslims' by escaping the marriages their parents had forced on

them:

People will blame religion, but religion actually gives you the right to say no... Islam doesn't allow forced marriage. There are certain communities that are known for perpetrating forced marriages and that's a cultural thing, it's not a religious thing. It takes place in other parts of the world that are [geographically] similar, but not all Muslim.

When activists choose to argue against violence within the Islamic framework, they do so because they not only believe that women in the community will trust a sense of religious authority over secular state-based authority, but also because perpetrators of violence misleadingly use incorrect Islamic interpretations to justify their violence.

2) Domestic Violence in the United States

While there is anecdotal evidence of forced marriage also occurring in the American Muslim population, domestic violence organizations do not identify it as a pressing issue in the community. Instead, it appears to be a rather infrequent problem that receives little to no official attention, and is mostly treated as an example of human trafficking across various immigrant communities. The US State Department includes a section in its Foreign Affairs Manual that compares forced marriage to arranged marriage, explaining that US law considers the former to be a violation of basic human rights while the latter is an acceptable tradition supported by many cultures around the world, as long as it does not involve duress on the part of either intended spouse (US Dept. of State Foreign Affairs Manual 2007).

The broader shelter movement that fights violence against women in the US

shares a similar decline with the British refuge movement. The first women's shelter in the US was a legal-aid collective that started in 1972—the same year that the British Chiswick Women's Aid started. Soon after, the US also experienced a combination of neoconservative economics and a conservative social agenda in the 1980s that forced shelters to make considerable organizational changes. These changes involved a transition to more streamline- efficient services that impersonally treated victims as though they were the clientele of state social service agencies. This drew shelters' attention away from serving the diverse needs of the women who sought their help (Elman 2003).

This signaled the state's inadequate attempts to prevent violence against women across different communities and grassroots women's activism emerged among minority racial and ethnic groups. These groups formed their own shelters to meet the needs of their communities that they felt were being ignored by the state and, consequently, the mainstream organizations that the state controlled. However, Muslim women in both countries came to believe that even these minority organizations failed to meet their community's faith-based needs (e.g. dietary restrictions, prayer space, etc.).

The most-established Muslim domestic violence organization in the US that has developed to serve these needs is the Peaceful Families Project (PFP) in northern Virginia. PFP focuses on domestic violence in the more conventional sense—battery and abuse in the home. This organization was started by a second generation Muslim female activist and, after her recent demise, is now directed by her daughter. PFP recently conducted a national level quantitative survey of directors of Muslim domestic violence providers around the country that showed 85% of clients are from the immigrant Muslim population. One of the leaders of PFP explained that it is the

immigrant population's cultural interpretation of Islam that enables domestic violence to pervade the Muslim community and requires the organization to draw the same distinction between culture and religion. She explains:

When you're talking about religion to immigrant Muslims, there's this general notion that they must know more and that you must know less because you were born and raised [in the United States], so when you start to have discussions and you can quote a lot more scripture, they're always very surprised... there's some resentment and... an unwillingness to let go of that cultural baggage because then people would have to admit to themselves that they're following a cultural version of religion, not a more purist form.

In order to bolster its reinterpetive framework that distinguishes this 'purist' form of Islam from immigrants' cultural interpretations, this organization has enlisted the help of *imams* around the country. In response to research based on 22 mosques in New York City that found 96% of participants perceived the *imam* as a counselor and 74% had sought counseling from *imams* for safety issues (Abu-Ras and Gheith 2008), PFP decided that anti-domestic violence workshops must target local *imams*, training them on how to handle such situations among their congregations with publications and DVD resources that the organization produces.

One such publication is in the form of an edited volume surveying diverse perspectives on domestic violence within the American Muslim community (Abugideiri and Alkhateeb 2007). The introduction, written by Maha B. Alkhateeb, one of PFP's directors, explains that the second generation is more likely to see the

distinction between culture and religion and might more easily understand Islam's true prohibition against domestic violence. She writes: "More recent generations of indigenous and immigrant Muslims have begun to forge an 'American Islam,' one that is becoming more bereft of cultural norms and traditions that may contradict Islamic teachings" (Alkhateeb 2007: 6). In contrast, she argues that "some cultural practices in Muslim societies promote the uninhibited superiority of men, which is often shown to be a contributing factor to violence against women." This cultural imposition of patriarchal beliefs in the home, she believes, clearly contradicts Islam's egalitarian position on marriage.

C. Counterframes: Spiritual Abuse in Britain and the US

Activists at PFP argue that another reason they specifically use Islamic teachings to prevent domestic violence in the Muslim community is a pragmatic response to a phenomenon they call 'spiritual abuse,' where the abuser manipulates religious texts to benefit his own interpretation of patriarchal power. This misuse of religious texts has been documented in Christian and Jewish traditions as well, where the Bible and Torah are respectively used by men to support their abuse. In Muslim communities, men "quote Qur'anic verses out of context, reference unsubstantiated traditions of Prophet Muhammad, and sometimes even confuse cultural practices with Islam, since, in some families...the boundaries between culture and religion have been blurred" (Alkhateeb 2007: 21). Community members, such as clergy and mosque council members, also practice spiritual abuse in the Muslim community, exploiting the authority they enjoy as male leaders of the community.

Activists believe that appealing to the Islamic framework to argue against such violence is a pragmatic response because the secular alternative is impractical, since the state cannot counter with ideas of what proper Muslim behavior might be. In cases

that PFP observes, “Muslim women who internalize spiritual abuse struggle with the feeling that they will be wronging God if they challenge the violence, and that they will be condemned by their community leaders and the larger community if they leave their abusive situation” (Alkhateeb 2007: 22). Moreover, if this practice hasn’t convinced the victim to stay silent and she actually seeks help from an organization such as PFP, she often meets a lack of consideration by fellow community and even family members who have internalized the cultural definition of Islam themselves, discouraging her from seeking appropriate intervention. In order to tackle these counter-frames, activists find that it helps to use specific references in Qur’anic texts that demonstrate that such violence violates Qur’anic principles, and that seeking help only defends the rights Islam granted to women in the first place.

III. PROGNOSTIC FRAMING

Diagnostic framing identifies the problem of domestic violence and attributes blame for its prevalence in the Muslim community to the state’s inadequate attempts to protect women and the conflation between cultural and religious practices. Subsequently, activists engage in prognostic framing to offer solutions to this intracommunal problem. Their approach primarily involves the Islamic principle of *ijtihad* (critical reasoning) which they argue obliges all Muslims to take part in independent reasoning. Activists believe that independent reasoning will lead men and women to egalitarian interpretations of Islam. In the following sections, I first interrogate the concept of ‘culture’ further, and determine how exactly it relates to ideas of ‘purist’ religion. I present the historical debate between *ijtihad* and *ijma* (societal consensus) as a model that strongly forecasts the distinction that activists make between culture and religion. I use this model to demonstrate that activists might gain more analytical traction from reclassifying what they call ‘culture’ as

‘tradition.’ Next, I demonstrate that activists in both countries invoke *ijtihad* to justify their own reinterpetive strategy for gender-justice struggles. Finally, I describe the hermeneutic strategy employed by both scholars and activists that examines Qur’anic texts. This reinterpetive strategy demonstrates that traditional exeges conducted by males have incorrectly passed on a patriarchal perspective that contradicts Qur’anic principles.

A. Frame Articulation: Ijtihad vs. Ijma

Though the distinction between culture and religion is an important one to make for gender-justice activists who are worried that inaccurate interpretations of Islam are responsible for misogynistic practices, it is necessary to briefly problematize the way in which ‘culture’ is used as a catch-all term to refer to different interpretations that the first and second generations might hold due to different experiences of generation, migration, and tradition. As discussed above, many disciplines have addressed the challenge of identifying what, precisely, ‘culture’ identifies and it continues to be a much-contested topic. For the purposes of this chapter, however, it should be understood that “characterizing a culture is itself a political act, and the notion of cultures as preexisting things, waiting to be explained, has become increasingly implausible” and the cultural explanation has the “tendency to call on culture when faced with anything we cannot otherwise understand” (Phillips 2007: 45). The tendency of respondents to find some sort of cultural imperative in common between first generation immigrants from Somalia and Bangladesh highlights an almost hypocritical resistance to drawing an important distinction between different cultures, while a similar distinction between culture and religion is considered crucial to their activism.

So what do respondents actually mean when they repeatedly refer to culture and

blame the first generation's misogynistic interpretations of Islam on cultural practices? I suggest that this distinction between culture and tradition actually harks back to a central ideological debate in Islam during the construction of the *Sunnah*⁸⁹ after the Prophet's death. This debate argues the importance that Muslims attach to *ijtihad* (critical reasoning) versus *ijma* (societal consensus) in the creation of religious knowledge after the Prophet's lifetime. *Ijtihad* enables one to interpolate meaning by examining the revealed text in its own historical context, while *ijma* usually refers to the unanimous consent of jurists or the consensus of the entire community. Rahman (1965) tells us that these two modes of knowledge operated in symbiosis in the early years, and were meant to provide a democratic balance between using individual reasoning and communal consensus to determine proper Islamic practices in the *Sunnah*, since the Qur'an did not actually advise Muslims *how* to practice the faith (e.g. prayer guidelines, dietary restrictions, etc.). Theoretically, individual reasoning was meant to be checked by *ijma*, with the latter's emphasis on consensus incorporating interpretive differences. In reality, however, one of the founders of the four legal schools of Sunni Islam and an influential Arab jurist named Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad al-Shafi, made the tactical mistake of elevating the importance of *ijma* over *ijtihad* because he believed that communal consensus represented God's will. Scholars have commented that, as the outcome of *ijtihad*, *ijma* could be progressive, but the inverted relationship could lead to unfortunate conditions of theological conservatism (Moazzam 1992).

It is this historical relationship between two systems of knowledge that forecasts the current interpretive conflict between second generation gender-justice activists in Britain and the US and their first generation elders. Islamic scholars argue that *ijma*

⁸⁹ A term that refers to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.

was actually used to promote *taqlid* (tradition), and certain social norms became conflated with religious principles (Rahman 1965; Barlas 2002). Barlas further argues that this construction of the *Sunnah* that prioritized communal consensus and tradition over individual reasoning performed a political project by allowing the state to maintain stability through endorsing certain elite scholars' approved interpretations and discouraging further (potentially disruptive and challenging) interpretations from being put forward. Scholars began ruling in favor of the *hadith* when conflicts arose between their authority and the Qur'an, but instead of proposing a monolithic interpretation of Islam, they appeased society by incorporating pre-existing social norms into Islamic practice that were in fact contradictory to the Qur'an's teachings. Interestingly, this interpretation granted elevated religious status to pre-Islamic, misogynistic Arab practices such as female circumcision and being stoned to death for adultery (Barlas 2002).

This same distinction—between a true Islamic egalitarian position and customary practices that violate women's rights in the (incorrect) name of religion—exists in the interpretive conflict between my respondents and their first generation elders. Given this history, it becomes clear that the true target of reform is not a vague sense of 'culture' that impedes interpretation--in fact, culture is often used to identify constantly evolving, nebulous social norms--but 'tradition,' a concept that implies a sense of loyalty to the way things have historically been done. In the same way the reformers continue to employ *ijtihad* to rethink ways of the past and reason how new circumstances and conditions might affect Islamic knowledge, a number of activists in both countries referred to the importance of *ijtihad* and critical thinking in their gender-justice struggles:

Ijtihad ... is the ability to critically evaluate something.

Or you make it applicable for the situation...There are

obviously things that we need critical thinking for...because these things were obviously not discussed at the time of the Prophet. –*Student activist, 23, UK*

There's a verse in the *Hadith* about hitting a woman and if you take that out of context, you won't understand it. If you look at the translation it means you're not allowed to leave a mark on my body, so how was it said, when was it said, who was it said to, why was it said, you know, what was the condition of those people when it was said. Those are the preambles you need to apply before you can look at something. If you just read and do, that's not right, because you can't read between the lines. – *Mosque youth activist/local government, 28, UK*

I think [the second generation] is open to a lot more questioning, and that's on a spectrum. I question everything, absolutely everything...I personally see Muslim cultures around the world as stuck... and they've started to make religion stuck, because they refuse to reinterpret, they refuse to use critical thinking when looking at these issues...we have to reinterpret, especially if you come from more conservative backgrounds...in order to live in this society—*Domestic violence activist, 35, US*

And any student of Islam knows that you have to continue to interpret, it goes on and it goes on in the context of modernity. Something happened in the 10th century when *ijtihad* just sort of ceased, and we're interpreting everything in that time's cultural context—
Domestic violence activist/researcher, 33, US

The concept of *ijtihad* has actually been the subject of much controversy, regarding who is capable of its practice and whether it is still considered a legitimate means of interpreting Islamic texts. The practice of *ijtihad* to reinterpret the Qur'an, often on the subject of women's rights, is opposed by traditional Sunni scholars who believe that the 'gates of *ijtihad*' closed somewhere in the 10th century. Accordingly Sunni scholars were supposed to stop its practice and their teachings increasingly relied upon *taqlid* (tradition, as discussed above). An Islamic legal scholar known for his expertise regarding *ijtihad*, named Wael B. Hallaq, however, argues that no such closure is clear in Islamic history. Instead, the argument reflects the historical political project where *mujtahids* (scholars who practice *ijtihad* to reinterpret 'new' problems) were socially shamed out of existence in order to maintain social stability based on *ijma*. The process involved a gradual increase in qualifications and requirements deciding who was capable of legitimate *ijtihad*, but Hallaq concludes that, in fact, minimal legal knowledge required (Hallaq 1984).

The next section will demonstrate that, despite this controversy, the practice of *ijtihad* has flourished in Muslim women's hermeneutic scholarship, and it has also been adopted by second generation gender-justice activists to critically challenge misogynistic interpretations of Islam. In keeping with this chapter's focus on

domestic violence, I will narrow my analysis to two predominant female exegetes' (Asma Barlas and Amina Wadud) hermeneutic strategies that attempt to uncover Islam's prohibition on domestic violence. It should be noted, however, that each of these female scholars applies a similar hermeneutic model to a vast range of gender-justice issues, including topics as diverse as rights to inheritance and bear witness.

B. Hermeneutic Strategies: Scholar-Activists Reinterpret the Qur'an

There now exists a considerable body of scholarship that uses hermeneutic strategies to uncover what is believed to be Islam's true egalitarian spirit, and positions itself in opposition to conventional interpretations of Islam that portray it as a misogynistic religion (Davary 2009; Barazangi 2004; al-Hibri 2002; Barlas 2002; Wadud 1999; Mernissi 1992; Ahmed 1992). In this section I examine how two female scholars—Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas, who are considered to be preeminent Qur'anic exegetes on the topic of women's rights—demonstrate that women can derive the rights that protect them from domestic violence within a strictly Islamic framework, in contrast to a secular framework that outlines state-based rights.

Amina Wadud argues against an “atomistic methodology [that begins] with the first verse of the first chapter and [proceeds] to the second verse of the first chapter--one verse at a time” because this linear methodology fails to recognize larger themes. It also makes no methodological attempt at “linking similar Qur'anic ideas, syntactical structures, principles, or themes together” (Wadud 1999: 2). In order to offer a more comprehensive interpretation of the Qur'an, she argues that the *intention* behind the verse is crucial. This approach often means that she looks for multiple appearances of controversial words to understand how they are contextually applied in different passages. She refuses to take words at their surface definition for two main reasons: one, because what “concerns [her] most about the ‘traditional’ [interpretations] is that

they were exclusively written by males;” two, because the “Qur’an was revealed in seventh-century Arabia when the Arabs held certain perceptions and misconceptions about women and were involved in certain specific lewd practices against them” (Wadud 1999: 6). She admits that the exegete’s individual bias will always contaminate interpretation—such is the central admission of hermeneutics--yet believes that a holistic, non-linear interpretation that puts effort into unveiling major themes in the Qur’an can mitigate this bias to a reasonable extent.

Asma Barlas also advocates a hermeneutic strategy that recognizes the “textual and thematic holism of the Qur’an” in order to uncover what she believes is its inherently antipatriarchal epistemology. In fact, she believes that *ijtihad* is the central hermeneutic of Islamic reasoning and jurisprudence. She argues that the state has actually played an integral role in suppressing *ijtihad*--and thus hermeneutic strategies that might detect Islam’s true egalitarian spirit--because the state’s “ongoing involvement in sustaining the hegemony of conservative interpretive communities and of religious meaning has injected coercive power into the very heart of knowledge construction in many Muslim societies” (Barlas 2002: 88). Although the state she refers to is the historical development of the state in the Muslim world, and neither Britain nor the United States, activists in the West could apply this indictment to first generation male leaders as well. In their case, it is these male leaders who effectively hegemonize ‘traditional’ androcentric, primocentric interpretations of Islam. In response to these communal interpretations, Wadud, Barlas and second generation activists use *ijtihad* to reclaim Islam’s egalitarian themes.

Both Wadud and Barlas make an interesting discursive move in their work that prioritizes Islam as a rights-granting framework that effectively supercedes any state’s rights-granting ability: each in turn argues that the Qur’anic text, as God’s word, is

infallible, which interpreted properly would eliminate the need for other worldly authorities to protect women (Wadud 2006, 1999; Barlas 2002). Barlas describes this move as the Divine Ontology, or God's Self-Disclosure, which is the organizing principle of Islam and boils down to the following three assumptions: first, *tawhid* (Divine Unity) is the unicity of Allah; second, Allah would not do *zulm* (harm) to anyone; and third, Allah is incomparable, so cannot be equated with either man or woman. Each of these assumptions allows these exegetes to launch a hermeneutic strategy from a common ontology that says God sees men and women as equal, God would never do either harm, and God cannot be considered equal to either group (rejecting a common tactic of equating God and male to assert patriarchal interpretations).

Their hermeneutic strategies converge on the Qur'anic verse that is thought to most directly deal with domestic violence in family relations--verse 4:34:

Men are [*qawwamuna 'ala*] women [on the basis] of what Allah has [preferred] (*faddala*) some of them over others, and [on the basis] of what they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are [*qanitat*], guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As for those from whom you fear [*nushuz*], admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then, if they obey you, seek not a way against them. - Qur'an 4:34 (as cited in Wadud 1999: 70)

Wadud begins with the linguistic approach, focusing on *nushuz*, and its traditional translation when applied to the wife, as 'disobedience to the husband.' She looks for

the application of the word elsewhere in the Qur'an, however, and finds it in verses where it also applies to men. She argues: "since the Qur'an uses *nushuz* for both the male and the female, it cannot mean 'disobedience to the husband.'" She prefers Sayyid Qutb's definition of the term as a state of *disorder* between the married couple. Wadud argues that this interpretation is more logically consistent with not only the different applications of *nushuz* elsewhere in the Qur'an, but with the Qur'an's thematic focus on family relations that treat spouses as equal partners.

She moves on to discuss the solution to this disorder and points out that the Qur'an lays out a three-step process. The first resort is a verbal solution, the second is separation, and the third is the scourge. It is this third, and final, resort that misogynistic interpretations of the verse 4:34 have used to justify male violence, but Wadud refers back to the ontological position discussed above and argues that "the nature of the 'scourge' cannot be such as to create conjugal violence or a struggle between the couple because that is 'un-Islamic'" (Wadud 1999: 75). What would otherwise appear as circular logic actually derives its definition from the ontological position that God would not cause harm--for the purposes of thematic consistency, the scourge could not be considered violence if the Qur'an's broader message insists that family relations be harmonious. Returning to a linguistic hermeneutic strategy, Wadud admits that the use of *daraba* in the third suggestion is traditionally interpreted, 'to strike,' but that this word has also been used when "Allah *gives* or *sets* an example," or "when someone leaves, or 'strikes out' on a journey" (Wadud 1999: 76).

Barlas agrees with Wadud there may be alternative definitions of *daraba*, but argues that another example in the Qur'an suggests that even if it is taken to mean 'to strike' in a physical sense, it is meant as more of a symbolic than punitive gesture. She points to the the passage where Job threatens to beat his wife for cursing God and God

asks Job to instead take a little grass in his hand and *daraba* his wife. Since grass cannot possibly cause bodily injury and God intervened to prevent Job from beating her more violently, Barlas argues that *daraba* should be seen as a restrictive, rather than prescriptive, treatment of domestic violence. She also supports this interpretation by considering historical context at the time of the revelation, when wife beating was considered a norm. By making the symbolic admonishment the third, and final, resort, Barlas argues that the Qur'an must have meant to restrict such violence.

Though activists invoke a broader understanding of *ijtihad* as general critical thinking, cited earlier, some activists also apply hermeneutic exegeses of Islamic texts. PFP's reinterpetive strategy, for instance, uses specific Qur'anic verses to educate Muslims about peaceful family relations and tries to counter spiritual abuse by stressing that committing violence is, in fact, wronging God. Again, appealing to religiously-derived rights allows activists to appeal to victims' faith-based priorities, as opposed to the secular approach of state-based rights. The organization uses the following verses in their workshops and resources to fight domestic violence:

And among His signs is this: that He created for you mates from among yourselves so that you may dwell in tranquility with them. He has put love and mercy between your hearts; in that are signs for those who reflect. (30:21)

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice as witnesses to God, even if it is against yourselves, or your parents, or your relatives; and whether it is against someone whos is rich or poor. (4:135)

And why should you not fight in the cause of God and

for those who, being weak, are ill-treated and oppressed? Men, women, and children, whose cry is, ‘Our Lord! Rescue us from this place where there are oppressors, and raise for us from You one who will protect and help! (4:75)

If two parties among the believers fall into a quarrel, make peace between them. But, if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then all of you should fight against the one that transgresses until the person complies with the command of God; but if the person complies, then make peace between them with justice and be fair, for God loves those who are fair and just. (49:9)

PFP compiles these specific verses to engage in reinterpetive activism that fights against domestic violence. In order to demonstrate that Islam prohibits domestic violence, they quote the ultimate religious authority—Islamic scripture.

C. Counterframes: Deriving Rights from an Islamic Framework

In both exegetes’ work, as well as the work of domestic violence organizations, the restriction against domestic violence is clear in the Qur’an, but has been misinterpreted by traditional interference. They consequently apply *ijtihad* to uncover the true intention behind certain language and verses’ intentions. Whereas the rights that these scholar-activists derive from Islam are in reality also protected by both the British and US states, their deliberate move to argue against violence from within an Islamic framework makes strategic sense since believers are more likely to accept the authority of religious, rather than secular, language. This reinterpetive strategy fights

against domestic violence by emphasizing Islamic restrictions placed upon men harming women, instead of appealing to secular laws that provide protective orders and would ideally arrest abusers to stop such violence. By referring to an Islamic framework, these scholars aim to not only convince women that God intends them no harm and that such violence is un-Islamic, but they accuse abusers of being un-Islamic as well.

A number of British Muslim activists believe that the Islamic framework grants them their rights as women, instead of either a secular state framework or secular Western feminist tradition. In many cases, activists expressed that they often equate the word feminism with orientalist tendencies that automatically assume Islam oppresses women. Instead, some activists suggest that Islam is more interested than the Western feminist tradition in the liberation of *all* women:

Feminists think that Muslim women are oppressed, maybe because I wear a headscarf or I don't show as much skin, but to me that's not oppression, that's liberation. Because selling your self, what does that accomplish? The men enjoy it, you lose your self-esteem, and it oppresses other women because they feel that they have to beautify themselves and go the extra mile. It just debases you...I think that feminism was established long ago, and we were given our rights by the Quran and the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, who changed the society for women and gave us rights that were unknown to women in the seventh century.

– *Student organizer, 28, UK*

I don't feel that women need to project themselves in that fashion, or concentrate on that aspect of things. The whole system in Islam gives women their rights and we don't need to aspire to another ideology, feminism, to be able to gain our rights. Within Islam we have more rights than the average lady on the road.

– *Student/Political organizer, 23, UK*

When I think of the word feminist, I think of someone fighting for women's rights, but we have those rights anyway... and I get these rights from my religion. So while some people might be ignorant of those rights, I have those rights and I know I'm entitled to those rights. For example, like my mum, whatever she says goes--in Islam, you're not allowed to question your mother... that's a right of a mum, and her right is that whatever she says (as long as it doesn't go against the laws of the Creator) goes... if you don't give her that right, you're committing a sin and you're going against the Creator... I feel like I have those rights and I don't need to fight for them; they've been given to me by God and no one can actually take them away from me because God gave them to me. –*Islamic school teacher, 24, UK*

Activists suggest that their religion grants them rights as women that supersede either what the secular state could offer or the rights for which the secular women's

movement struggles. Whereas the secular state-based rights framework relies upon law enforcement that may be vulnerable to external factors such as limited resources and prejudice to prevent violence, the religious framework relies upon the believer's fundamental desire to be a good Muslim. This alternative Islamic framework, activists argue, makes a separate ideological struggle to obtain gender rights outside of religion effectively redundant.

Similarly, in the US, PFP operates under the assumption that interventions against domestic violence in the Muslim community must rely on educating Muslims about Islamic teachings that prohibit any sort of violence in the family, rather than appealing to secular state-based rights that Muslim women are entitled to in the West. For example, the publication talks about the problem of marital rape, arguing:

Verbal, emotional, physical and spiritual manipulation is un-Islamic, and at no time is the use of any type of force acceptable by any party. If a spouse insists on practicing sexual relations in a way that lies outside the Islamic dictates of 'mercy' and 'compassion' then that person has *violated* divine orders and is subject to punishment in a court of law in this life, and is also deemed to be held accountable in the hereafter.

While marital rape was legal in the US until as late as 1976, it is nonetheless technically illegal in all 50 states *today*, meaning that Muslim women can appeal to this secular law if they find themselves the victims of such a crime. Instead, however, PFP believes that combating domestic violence is more effective in a faith-based community by appealing to the more familiar Islamic framework. One of the leaders explains why she uses the religious framework to convince women that they have

these religiously derived rights to safety: “You cannot go to a group of people and hope to help them in a way that doesn’t relate to their reality--they need a solution that they’re going to adopt.” In this case, the reality of immigrant victims of domestic violence is that they have been removed from any support networks they might have had in their country of origin, they sometimes live with in-laws who are multiple abusers, they often have passports and other documents withheld to limit their mobility and regularly live in fear and distrust of the authorities. These vulnerabilities compound the difficulty of appealing to secular state-based rights to exit situations of domestic violence and the more familiar appeals to religion might give them more ammunition in seeking help from family or community leaders.

IV. FRAME TRANSFORMATION

Activists also engage in non-violent intracommunal issues by transforming the frames they use to fight against domestic violence. *Frame transformation* is one of four frame alignment processes through which movements can take their framing of a particular issue and adapt it to broader interests, expanding the scope of the original frame (Benford and Snow 2000). While frame bridging, frame amplification and frame extension also help to link existing frames to new points of interest, frame transformation is seen as the most ambitious alignment process for symbolic innovation (Tarrow 1998).

In the case of my research, activists use frame transformation to adapt the practice of *ijtihad* to issues beyond the scope of domestic violence that also warrant critical reasoning, such as marriage norms in the diaspora. This section will demonstrate how activists apply *ijtihad* to construct feminist tropes in the Prophetic tradition, and subsequently use the narrative of one of the most popular heroines

(Khadija—the Prophet’s first wife) to endorse their reinterpretation of marriage rules in Islam. This strategy not only transforms the practice of *ijtihad*, but it also transforms old understandings of parental involvement in finding partners for children, generating a new process of ‘self-initiated’ marriages. This development still seeks parental approval, yet operates as a system that prioritizes the second generation’s religious identity over the cultural preservation that their parents seek.

A. Transforming Ijtihad

My findings suggest that gender-justice activists are using *ijtihad* to articulate a ‘new Islam’ in both Britain and the US that is distinct from the Islam of their first generation elders. While the *literal* practice of *ijtihad* involves a hermeneutic strategy that closely analyzes texts and looks for logical inconsistencies between definitions and their historical context, as well as applications of certain words across various verses, its *figurative* application employs critical thinking to highlight female role models and interpret stories in the Qur’an and Prophetic tradition as myths and tropes that symbolize positive virtues. Respondents made recurrent references to women in the Prophet’s life:

Khadija was actually older than the Prophet...a businesswoman, she was a leader in her own right in many ways. I look at her as a role model and she was never dependent on any man. I see myself and my mum in the same way—neither of us has ever been dependent on a man.—*Local Authority Worker, 28, UK*

In stories that are told, you can’t relate to the experience unless you can somewhat relate to that experience. So I

think things are changing as women become more alive and have more opportunities, education... they're drawing on their tradition to say, hang on, what are the examples? What were women doing at that time? Actually there's all sorts of things ... Khadija was a businesswoman at a time when it was a patriarchal society.—*Chair of community non-profit, 38, UK*

I think you have to be careful who you read from and who you take your sources from. The Quran is clear, there's no room for error or doubt, extreme error or doubt. The Prophet's wives, Aisha and Khadija, were great leaders. The first martyr was a woman. So women have had a critical impact ... they are the ones who shaped the future, and they have the biggest contribution.—*Student Organizer, 28, UK*

I always viewed Islam as something that liberated women and gave them a lot of rights. For me, Islam is the reason I went to business school, because I grew up hearing stories of the Prophet's wife and how successful she was. My mom used to read me stories when I was little and she was a fantastic woman--she would have been the CEO of Pepsi if she were alive today...so for me, Islam has always been very empowering. – *National Level Student Organizer, 25, US*

[When I ran a campaign insisting that women should be part of our school's MSA], I would use Khadija (PBUH), who was the wife of the Prophet. She was the more powerful one in the relationship, she was wealthy, she was a businessowner, a merchant. She had an established life and career. She was older--all of these things... so she was never sectioned off from society. I would use the wives of the Prophets as examples--his daughters too, Fatima being one of them, as being very outspoken, loud... Musaiba, who wasn't a wife or a daughter, but a follower, she actually went to battle and jumped in front of him one day when he was being attacked. So women were always integrated and the Prophet never, ever shut women out from public discourse, from education, from anything. – *Local government advisor, 28, US*

These findings suggest that second generation activists are constructing *sacred feminist tropes* out of commonly told stories about women in the Prophetic tradition.

Gottfried Hagen (2009) argues “the interpretive function of myth” is an important tool used to analyze the stories of the Prophet in Islam, even though Islam is deeply suspicious of myth, as are other monotheistic religions. Despite this, he proposes a ‘functional approach’ which “studies myths as binding memories...[and] applied narrations... which respond to certain societal needs and concerns about the experience of the world and the human condition” (Hagen 2009: 307). Though Hagen

fails to mention any female characters in the Prophet's life, his functional approach resembles how my respondents employ female characters in Islam: they remember particular narratives about certain women's lives that demonstrate that strong, independent, women were an integral part of historical Islam and prove that women were deeply valued in Islam's early days. This strategy was employed by respondents across different levels of education and class status, suggesting that the construction of sacred feminist tropes could be a more accessible hermeneutic strategy for activists to reinterpret women's role in Islam than scholarly strategies that rely on academic exegeses of the Qu'ran.

While respondents mentioned Aisha as one of the Prophet's favorite wives and revered her for leading soldiers into the Battle of Basr, or referred to Fatima (the Prophet's daughter) and her struggle to win her Islamically granted inheritance rights after her father's death, the most prominent feminist trope mentioned is Khadija's role in the Prophet's life. Activists not only venerate her in the quotes above for her business prowess and successful career, but they also repeatedly raise the fact that she was older to the Prophet and took it upon herself to propose marriage to him:

But it's the traditional sense of courting I suppose, you just have someone with you, instead of being alone. The interpretation of some people is that because some people are so strict, there's no room to meet anyone. Because historically communities used to be smaller, a man could see a woman doing shopping, like her, inquire, someone would know her, and then they could get married. Like Khadija, the Prophet was her employee, and she inquired about him and so forth, found out about his character, inquired through a third

person whether he'd be interested in her, instead of approaching him directly. She actually proposed to him. We don't have those limitations. Whereas today, everyone says, noooo, the guy has to propose to you, but that's because it's cultural influence. –*Local Authority Community Engagement Worker, 28, UK*

[Khadijah] was a smart, sophisticated woman who knew what she wanted and how to get it. When I read stories about her, I admire not only her dignity and grace, but also her determination and self-confidence... the story of Khadijah's proposal and subsequent marriage to Muhammad was often recounted as part of the discussion that Muslims had about the rights of women in Islam.. To understand our heritage and the principles which underpinned our story as people of faith, we looked back at the individuals like Muhammad and Khadijah who had laid the foundations of Islam. –
Author (Love in a Headscarf), 35, UK

The reinterpetive strategy of using Khadija's feminist trope about self-initiated marriage transforms part of the frame that activists use to counter domestic violence in the Muslim community—namely, they draw a similar distinction between tradition and religion to clarify that Islam, in fact, requires individual consent in marriages (preventing forced marriages, discussed above), and also considers all ethnicities and races equally. This interpretation is offered in direct contrast to the first generation's efforts at cultural preservation. During interviews, activists argued that the first

generation strongly prefers intragroup marriages and would like for the second generation to marry within endogamous ethnic or racial boundaries. In spite of this, activists demonstrate that reinterpreting a more ‘purist’ Islam mandates prioritizing the religious identity above all else, which effectively endorses intergroup unions. However, transforming the frame involves *changing* the role that parental approval plays in second generation marriages, without rejecting it completely. This transformation means that second generation women still abide by Islamic restrictions on pre-marital intimacy and wish to obtain parental approval, even if they have found their own partners outside of their ethnic or racial group.

B. Reinterpreting Marriage Norms

Advocates for arranged marriages, from numerous faith and immigrant communities, argue that the practice of matchmaking through family and friends preserves cultural traditions and provides options for individuals who have otherwise limited options due to cultural or religious restrictions on dating, which is an otherwise popular system of finding partners in the West. However, the distinction between this system and forced marriage is one of great importance to respondents. In discussing parental and community involvement in making matches, respondents made recurrent references to Islamic requirements for consent. In interviews, they cite the same story from the Prophetic tradition that the British student activist cited above about the woman whose marriage was considered null and void because it was initiated without her consent.

Whereas anecdotal evidence suggests that arranged marriage may be on the rise in the second generation,⁹⁰ activists in both countries emphasize the importance of

⁹⁰ See Williams, Amy and Amy DePaul. 2008. “The Rise of Arranged Marriage in America” *Altnet.org*.
http://www.altnet.org/sex/92561/the_rise_of_arranged_marriage_in_america/;

individual consent in such unions, which suggests that there might be conflicts between the first generation's interests in procuring a match and the interests of their second generation children. Respondents in both countries claim that the incidence of interethnic marriages is noticeably higher among second generation Muslims than the first generation and argue that it is, once again, *cultural* conventions of racism that prevail among the first generation in trying to prevent their children's marriages to exogamous partners:

In Pakistan, the culture that my parents come from, it's very unusual for a person to marry outside of the Pakistani culture. And I'm marrying a Bengali, someone who's from Bangladesh and the fact is that I didn't feel that his nationality was important to me because he had full Islamic principles. So... culture would say why are you marrying outside of your culture? Because it's a cultural norm to marry within your [community]. Even so much that you should marry people within your province. My parents obviously broke that because my parents are from different parts of Pakistan but I went one step further and married a person from a different country. But he's not really from a different country because we were both brought up in Britain...and the Muslim identity was important. –*Student organizer, 23, UK*

The individuals who are more religious will often organize themselves in a way so that their Islamic values

are ...the criteria. And so anything that fits the criteria from either of their ethnic or cultural affiliations is okay and whatever doesn't fit the criteria is amoral... and they'll kind of let it go. I think it's fascinating because it allows for young Muslims who are growing up to marry across ethnic lines with much more frequency. So, just to give examples of my own age group, there are a lot of people who have married the same ethnic background as them but there are at least 7 people off the top of my head who have married someone from a very distinctly different ethnic background and that was primarily achieved because they prioritized their religion. –
Mosque Youth Worker, 29, US

These activists suggest that the religious and Western nationalities that women share with their partners supercede the cultural heritage that may differ between their parents.

Denise al-Johar conducts a (2005) qualitative study of second generation American Muslim women's marriage decisions in Houston's Sunni immigrant community and concludes that marriages arranged strictly through family and friends correlates exclusively with unions between people in the same linguistic or ethnic group, while what she calls 'self-initiated' marriages correlates exclusively with unions between people from different linguistic or ethnic groups. In the latter group, nonetheless, all of the young women in the study still admit to following Islamic principles of marriage, including abstaining from any premarital intimate relations and attempting to gain their parents' approval. Al-Johar also detects the distinction

between culture and religion that informs her respondents' marriage behavior: "informants following this route to marriage explained that the arranged marriages of their homelands are actually more cultural than religious, and in America they took the opportunity to follow Islamic rules of marriage instead" (al-Johar 2005: 568). Her findings suggest that "increased religiosity and an emphasis on ethnic equality in the Qur'an legitimate[s] young Muslims' desires to marry beyond their communities" (571).

While al-Johar's study is relatively small (n=27) and limited to one, albeit densely populated, geographical concentration of Muslims, her research falls in line with my own findings regarding second generation perspectives on intermarriage in both countries (See Figure 1). Though it should be noted that my samples are also too small to confidently extrapolate generalizations across the Muslim activist population in either country, I use my data to illustrate a significant and suggestive difference between the marriage behavior of Muslim activist women and the rest of the country.

I created a subsample of my respondents who are married and compared the prevalence of intermarriage in this group against the rates of comparable unions in each country's entire population.⁹¹ The figure illustrates that an overwhelming number of marriages in both countries' national populations are endogamous with

⁹¹ I use the term intermarriage to describe unions that cross 'community' lines. In the US, the term 'interracial' gained prevalence due to historical miscegenation laws that prohibited unions between a white and a non-white spouse. The Supreme Court case of *Loving v. Virginia 388 U.S. 1 (1967)* declared such laws were unconstitutional and violated both the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment. However, after ongoing immigration for the past four decades in the US, 'interracial' does not accurately describe the increase in unions across ethnic groups in the US that may not involve a white spouse—such unions are more recently being described as 'interethnic' (as they are referred to in Britain), but both interracial and interethnic are coupled in recent research (see Pew Research Center report cited below) in reporting exogamous marriages.

only a minority reporting exogamous marriages.⁹² A 2010 Pew Research Center report that surveyed American couples in 2008 reports that one in seven new marriages is interracial or interethnic in nature.⁹³ The only accessible British data gathered by the UK national census of 2001 that reports interethnic unions at 2 percent is outdated, though there is no reliable reason or recent data to suggest that the percentage has increased significantly. Among the subsample of my respondents, however, 69 percent of American Muslim activists and 63 percent of British Muslim activists report exogamous marriages, which involve marrying outside either their racial or ethnic group. These rates, illustrated in the graph below, comprise suggestive evidence that activists are disproportionately involved in exogamous marriages, far surpassing both countries' average rates of interracial/interethnic marriages. **See Figure 3.1.**

⁹² Endogamous marriage refers to marrying within a specific group, while exogamous marriage refers to marrying outside of a specific group to which an individual belongs. The ambiguity of the 'group' is precisely why I use this term to describe intermarriage unions—in some cases they may be unions across racial lines, in others they may cross ethnic lines. In either scenario, there is a distinct group boundary that is noticeably preserved or challenged by endogamous and exogamous unions.

⁹³ See Pew Research Center Report: Passel, Jeffrey S., Wendy Wang and Paul Taylor. 2010. *Marrying Out*. Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C.

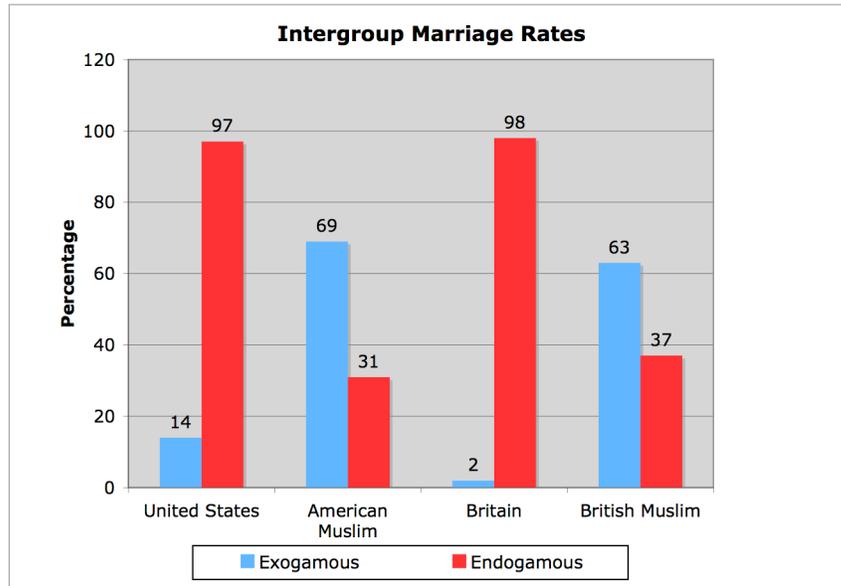


Figure 3.1: Marriage Rates

Sources: US: Pew Research Center; Britain—Office for National Statistics; Muslim sub-group: author’s interview data.

Respondents in both countries argued that the first generation’s tendency towards cultural preservation, which manifests itself not only in endogamous pairings for their children but in culturally-segregated mosques and community centers as well, leads to racial exclusiveness in both countries. A 24 year old teacher in an Islamic primary school in Britain explains her disdain with the first generation’s racism towards people outside of certain cultural groups:

Pakistanis, culturally, will turn around and look down upon a black person, but then I turn around and say to them ‘do you know Islam got [to Africa] first before it got to you?’ and then they’re shocked. It’s a cultural

thing, but if they were 100% practicing, they wouldn't think like that. They would look at them on equal footing, because it's all equal in Islam. If there are congregational prayers, a king will pray in the same line as a pauper.

A 28 year old American Muslim activist of Indian origin who works for New York City's local government describes her relationship with a Black convert male:

Black men are 40% of our prison population, 50% of our unemployed, and black women, in the grand scheme of racial dating and hierarchy are at the very bottom, so I used to think 'who the hell am I to take one educated black man from that pool, when I have a billion South Asians to choose from, technically?' So that was really hard for me to get over. It was really [my husband] being like, 'no, no, no, it has nothing to do with my color or your color, it has much more to do with the fact that we're both American and we're both Muslim and we need to really unite around that.'

According to this respondent, the religious and national identities that she shares in common with her partner supercede their differences in ethnicity or race, echoing the British respondent of Pakistani origin quoted above who plans to marry a British Muslim male of Bangladeshi origin. The same American Muslim respondent went on to explain that she also reads a revolutionary fervor into the interethnic/interracial unions between second generation Muslims:

Dr. Jackson... talks about this immigrant-indigenous

divide and talks about how the third resurrection of Islam in America will be when immigrants and indigenous [Muslims] figure out how to work together and one of the ways that's going to happen is through marriage. So I started to think less about the fact that I'm taking a black man from the black community... and more about the fact that I'm from a... middle-class South Asian household that's now going to accept a working-class Brooklyn black boy--woah, in what world is that happening? You know what I mean? So that revolutionary mindset kind of propelled me to get my parents to start being okay with it.

Dr. Sherman Jackson, cited by the respondent above, is an Islamic Studies scholar as well as the co-founder of the American Learning Institute for Muslims (ALIM), a specialized institute that “seeks to produce Islamically literate members of society that will have a positive effect on Muslim society as well as the society at large.”⁹⁴ Four of my respondents personally attended ALIM summer programs for students, and mentioned that it is one of the central networking events where second generation American Muslim activists meet.

Jackson's (2005) work on the ‘third resurrection’ claims that Islam spread among Black Americans, prior to the influx of foreign born Muslims in 1965, because of the distinctively American phenomenon of ‘Black religion’ that was used to combat racism. He argues that Black Americans must fight the claims of “immigrant supremacy” that suggest Blacks do not follow an ‘authentic’ form of Islam and that

⁹⁴ <http://www.alimprogram.com/overview/introduction.shtml>

the key to this fight might be to unite with second generation Muslims, who are also interested in battling the first generation's feelings of supremacy that conflate cultural beliefs with acceptable Islamic practice. Along this vein, interethnic/interracial marriage helps construct the new Islamic identity of the West and depends on a similar reinterpetive strategy that second generation women use to fight domestic violence.

While the previous literature on intermarriage in the West has been limited to work that assumes intermarriage with a white partner suggests higher rates of integration (Alba and Nee 2003; Lee and Bean 2004), more recent analysis has also looked at increasing rates of intermarriage between ethnic and racial minorities. Miri Song's (2009) analysis, for example, suggests that our conceptualization of interethnic unions should expand to include more complicated interethnic unions, particularly in multicultural societies. In discussing ethnicity versus religion, she argues: "in Britain, it may be that second generation Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani Britons may intermarry if their common sense of being second generation Asian overrides their different ethnic backgrounds. Of course, intermarriage across religious lines--for instances, between Hindus and Muslims--may be an inhibiting factor" (Song 2009: 344). Although the idea of an interreligious union might inhibit interethnic unions across certain groups, my findings suggest that *intrareligious* unions might encourage interethnic unions across other groups, e.g. Pakistani-Bangladeshi, Asian-Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Caribbean-Convert, etc. While the data are limited on interethnic Muslim marriages in both countries, my findings suggest that gender-justice activists represent disproportionately high rates of interethnic unions in both countries. This disproportionate inclination to join interethnic or interracial unions reflects a similar reinterpetive strategy to reclaim Islam in the West. Activists transform the frame they use to fight domestic violence by employing *ijtihad* to distinguish between

misogynistic cultural practices and egalitarian religious principles, in order to pursue marriages that prioritize their Muslim identity.

V. CONCLUSION

Just as second generation Muslim women activists in both Britain and the United States counter what they believe to be misrepresentation of the Muslim woman in mainstream media outlets in the each country's public sphere, activists also contest the construction of the Muslim woman within the private sphere. This latter form of activism takes the form of challenging what activists believe to be *misinterpretation* of Islam's position on gender-justice. A group of reinterpetive activists have emerged to counter an androcentric, primocentric interpretation of how women should be treated in Muslim communities, a version that activists believe exclusively uses the first generation Muslim male and his interests to construct gender relations in Islam. Rather, they argue, Islam was founded with a fundamentally egalitarian spirit; they promote alternative translations and interpretations of the original texts that reveal the religion's positive position on gender-justice.

In a sense, this position has ramifications that go beyond the private sphere as well. In the public sphere, if we remember back to the previous chapter, some activists suggested that some community members might perpetuate conservative stereotypes of gender relations in the Muslim community. This chapter explained that such representation of gender relations in the community points back to misinterpretations of religious texts. If activists can change how Muslims themselves believe Islam treats women, then more positive representations of gender relations could have a ripple effect on public constructions of the Muslim woman as well.

In observing how activists go about countering misrepresentation and misinterpretation in both public and private spheres, it became evident that activists

choose to frame their claims differently—even *within* campaigns tackling the same issue (e.g. women’s rights in mosques). In the next chapter, I discuss the different frames and explore the diversity and disagreement that comprise the community of second generation Muslim women activists in both Britain and the United States.

The fact that activists make the conscious decision between appealing to the diversity within religious interpretations of gender instead of appealing to the diversity apparent within ethnic cultures suggests that the religious identity may hold more salience in the second generation’s desire to organize its members’ lives for themselves. Anne Swidler, a sociologist who theorizes how culture and religion may affect behavior argues that “doctrine and casuistry tell people how to act and provide blueprints for community life...ritual acquires such significance in unsettled lives because ritual changes reorganize take-for-granted habits and modes of experience” (Swidler 1986: 279). Second generation activists stress the idea that being born and raised in the West divorces them from the cultural traditions in which their parents were raised, yet the literal and figurative distance created by their parents’ migration allows second generation activists to experiment with their religious identity. In ‘unsettled’ periods of what they believe to be misdirected hostility towards Muslims and racial/ethnic profiling, perhaps activists find the ritual guidance of religion to be comforting, rather than mere membership in a race/ethnic group.

Moreover, because the conservative interpretations of women’s roles are being advocated by first generation males in the Muslim community under the guise of religious authority, activists deliberately choose to counter such religious justifications with religious counter-arguments themselves. In this sense, activists are persisting in the activism of those scholars who defend the principal of individual reasoning (*ijtihad*) over communal reasoning and tradition (*ijma*). They revive the argument that cultural interpretation of religion may distort religious teachings through communally

sanctioned and normalized behavior. In order to reclaim what they believe to be the original egalitarian spirit of Islam, second generation activists pursue reinterpreted strategies that appeal to religion, instead of cultural or ethnic identities that they associate exclusively with the first generation of Muslim immigrants.

CHAPTER 4

A TYPOLOGY OF GENDER-JUSTICE CLAIMS

Although the past two chapters focused on the remarkable similarities between the representative and reinterpreted claims that emerge among second generation women in the Muslim communities of both Britain and the United States, it is important to note that variation still exists *within* these gender-justice campaigns. While campaigns vary from the public to private sphere, there also appear to be differences in how activists sometimes use different frames to argue why gender-justice has been violated and how it should be remedied. For instance, some activists argue that gender-justice in the home requires men to follow their Islamic duty to provide for all of the women in his household, while others would argue that gender-justice in the home requires a dismantling of the gender relations that place breadwinning responsibilities on the man's shoulders and child-rearing responsibilities on the woman's shoulders. In both cases, women activists are concerned about women's interests in the home, but the ways in which they believe a violation of justice has occurred and how they propose correcting the situation are expressed through different frames.

In the first three chapters, I addressed the conventional approaches to using framing theory. To be precise, chapter one explains that the purpose of framing is to produce social meaning and understanding; chapter two describes how media outlets engage in framing to generate versions of social reality, and compete against counterframes offered by critics who have a different understanding of what should constitute that reality; and chapter three explains how activists use framing to diagnose the problems they face, and prognostic framing to offer solutions to fix them. In this

chapter, I explain how *within-campaign variation* in the gender-justice activism of second generation Muslim women reflects variation in strategic framing, and how the discursive process of campaign claims ranges from making *affirmative claims* to *transformative claims*. I conceptualize a typology of gender-justice claims that illustrates the intersection of claims' *targets* (public vs. private) and *frames* (affirmative vs. transformative).

First, I explain that the framing dimension takes its cue from Nancy Fraser's (1997) typology of justice struggles. Specifically, I argue that activists' claims can vary from using *affirmative* frames, which aim to "correct inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them," to *transformative* frames, which aim to "[correct] inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework" (Fraser 1997: 11). Next, I use three examples of gender-justice campaigns to illustrate that activists working on the same gender issue can vary between those who use affirmative or transformative frames to make their claims: 1) gender-justice in mosques, 2) gender-justice in student leadership, and 3) gender-justice in LGBT rights. While the first two cases address framing variation in the private and public spheres, respectively, the third case employs a relatively new form of activism to demonstrate that frames do not simply vary in campaigns having to deal with segregation (one of the central issues in the first two campaigns). Throughout these case studies, I argue that affirmative frames appear across both countries' campaigns, and seem to be favored for strategic purposes when activists confront opposition in their struggles or lack support from the broader community of Muslim women. Transformative frames, however, seem to only emerge in the US, suggesting that there might be American national contextual factors that allow activists to use frames that may be less strategic and more experimental in their framing. While this chapter focuses on illustrating a typology of

gender-justice claims through a combination of original interview data and content analysis of organizational histories, missions and events, the next chapter will propose an account of the different national contexts and explain how they influence this variation in framing.

I. FRAMING GENDER-JUSTICE CLAIMS

In *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the Post-Colonial Condition*, Nancy Fraser explores different claims for justice and organizes them into two main categories: redistribution and recognition. Redistributive claims center around injustices caused by political economy and are central to socialist ideas focused on the redistribution of wealth and resources post WWII, while the politics of recognition revolved around identity politics and focus on the intersection of multiple oppressions. Fraser argues that both of these claims are often made at one another's expense, while in actuality they are inextricably intertwined and that "the project of transforming the deep structures of both political economy and culture appears to be the one overarching programmatic orientation capable of doing justice to *all* current struggles (Fraser 1997: 32)." While redistribution and recognition form the claims' dimension, she also proposes that the remedies with which activists propose to rectify the injustices in question also vary along another dimension, from affirmative remedies to transformative remedies. Fraser argues that the intersection of these two dimensions maps out a typology of justice struggles.

It is the dimension between affirmative and transformative remedies that lends analytical traction to my examination of the variation that emerges *within* gender-justice activism in the Muslim diaspora. Fraser defines this dimension by explaining:

Affirmative remedies...proposes to redress disrespect by revaluing unjustly devalued group identities, while

leaving intact both the content of those identities and the group differentiations that underlie them...transformative remedies, by contrast, are currently associated with deconstruction. They would redress disrespect by transforming the underlying cultural-valuational structure (Fraser 1997: 24).

She illustrates this distinction by offering the example of the exploited class. On one hand, while affirmative remedies for class injustices typically include transfers, such as social insurance programs or public assistance programs, they do nothing to abolish class differences themselves; instead they institutionalize and strengthen them in order for the system of reallocation to work properly. Transformative remedies, on the other hand, seek to destabilize the class group identity and blur the differentiation that constitutes class division in order to promote reciprocity and solidarity between originally 'different' groups.

I use this distinction between activism that reinforces group differentiation and activism which strives to undermine group differentiation to organize the different frames with which my respondents make their claims for gender-justice. I argue that affirmative frames reinforce differentiation between men and women and transformative frames undermine this differentiation by challenging traditional gender relations. It is worth noting that transformative frames are different from Benford and Snow's (2000) *frame transformation* theory. Frame transformation was discussed in chapter three to explain how activists adapt the practice of *ijtihad* (critical reasoning) to issues beyond the scope of domestic violence, such as marriage norms in the diaspora; the transformation specifies when activists use the framing of a particular issue and adapt it to broader interests, expanding the scope of the original frame (Benford and Snow 2000). Transformative frames, alternatively, can also be

understood as another type of innovative framing strategy, but one that is more concerned with deconstructing underlying structures of power and reconstructing more just social organization. Mapping the intersection between the targeting dimension (outlined in chapters two and three) and the framing dimension that this chapter offers generates a typology of gender-justice claims. See **Figure 4.1**.

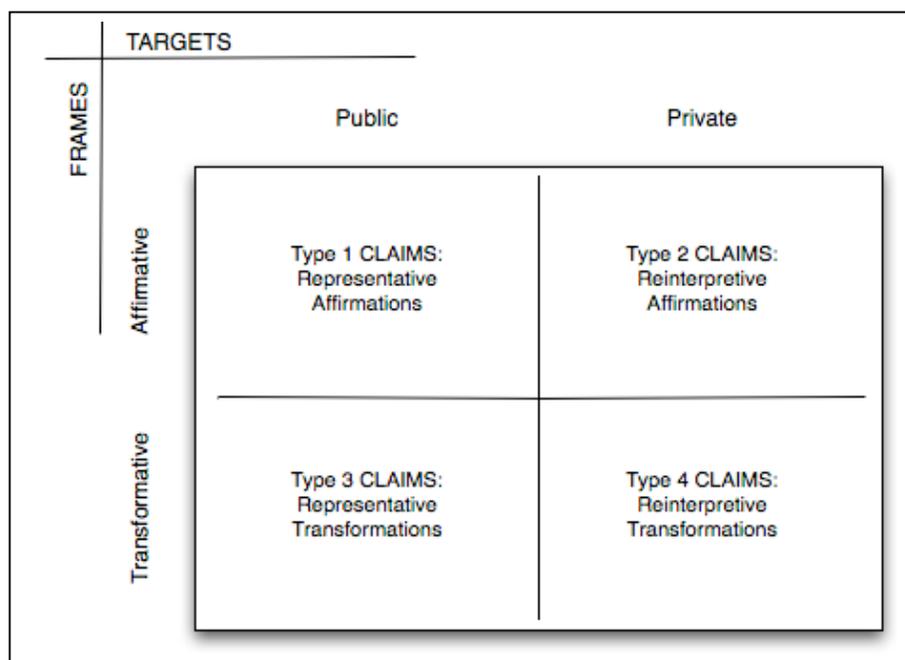


Figure 4.1: A Typology of Gender-Justice Claims

The previous two chapters outlined activism as it occurs along the first dimension of our typology of gender-justice claims, from activism that targets the public sphere in chapter two to activism that targets the private sphere in chapter three. In order to demonstrate the remarkable similarity between activism emerging in both countries, despite the differences between British and American Muslim populations, I confined my analysis to type 1 and type 2 claims, or public and private *affirmations*—that is, activism that tries to remedy inequities, without challenging fundamental gender relations. Media activists counter negative portrayals of Muslim women with examples of positive Muslim women role models, and anti-domestic violence activists

use hermeneutic strategies to argue that the Qur'an obliges husbands to treat their wives well. One could argue that public *transformations* might frame the media's underlying commercial objectification of women as the fundamental problem, or private transformations might frame deep-seated gender relations of a heteronormative household as the ultimate obstacle to gender-justice.

In this chapter, I engage with the framing dimension to demonstrate that similar campaign issues can be framed in different ways. This organization asks whether frames seek a superficial remedy in equal outcomes between genders or the long-term restructuring of gender relations themselves. Type 3 and type 4 claims are termed public and private transformations, respectively, meaning that they both challenge an existing power structure while trying to remedy gender inequalities and vary according to the targets (public or private) of their claims. *Representative transformations*, for instance, includes claims for female leadership in organizations, such as Muslim student organizations or adult civic organizations. Whereas existing norms in most Muslim communities in the West would argue that Islam only allows men to be leaders, activists making representative transformations challenge this gender hierarchy and argue that Muslim women should lead as well. Transformations also emerge in the private sphere, through *reinterpretive transformations* that challenge prevailing interpretations of leadership in mosques; interpretations of the texts are offered to support the idea that the Prophet himself encouraged women to be spiritual leaders. The following sections offer examples of campaigns that offer both affirmations and transformations.

II. CASE #1: GENDER-JUSTICE IN MOSQUES

In both Britain and the United States, women have mobilized to demand women's rights in mosques. Though these campaigns usually emerge out of individual

women's frustrating experiences with segregation in local community mosques, national groups have also taken interest in such struggles in both countries. At a basic level, demands in both countries overlap: women should be allowed entrance into the main prayer areas of mosques; women should be allowed to complete their regular prayers, as well as attend Friday *jumma* prayer services, at their mosques; and women should be allowed to serve on mosque leadership committees. The similarities between the campaigns in the two countries continue--both British and American Muslim women blame the male leaders' androcentric, primocentric interpretations of Islam for excluding women from active participation in mosques; both also use similar references to *hadith* that support their claim that the Prophet allowed the participation of women in mosques. These similarities generate affirmative frames for gender-justice in mosques in both countries. However, some important differences between the two countries' mosque campaigns emerge as well. The most prominent mainstream organizations in each country diverge in their support of these campaigns, with the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in the UK strongly resisting such efforts and the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) in the US endorsing them. The issue of women's leadership in mosques is also handled differently, particularly in the case of one scholar who was introduced in chapter three, Amina Wadud, and her distinct experience leading Friday prayers in both countries. This section describes how affirmative interpretations of women's rights in mosques have prevailed in both countries, while a more transformative interpretation that encourages women to serve as *imams* has only emerged in the US.

A. Gender-Justice in British Mosques

In Britain in 2006, the women's committee of a fairly mainstream organization,

the Muslim Public Affairs Council UK (MPACUK), mobilized around the Greater London area to demand entrance for women into the main prayer halls of British mosques. A Channel 4 News Documentary entitled, *Women Only Jihad* documents their efforts to convince local mosques to make space for women within their main prayer halls and on leadership committees, given that roughly 60% of Britain's mosques do not allow women access to mosques at all.⁹⁵ They have doors slammed in their face, and are repeatedly told by first generation male leaders to go home because "there is no room for women inside." They eventually pray outside on the mosque's driveway on carpets that they have brought with them, in case they need to make a public spectacle to make their voices heard. When the male leaders object and try to force the women off the premises, the activists tell them that they are obeying Islamic tenets by setting up "behind the men." The women activists are still pushed off the property and forced to pray on the pavement across the street. They insist that it is their Islamic right to pray inside the mosque and refer to the Prophet's orders for men not to turn women away when they choose to leave the home and pray in public. One woman asks a man at the Ilford mosque, "Women were allowed to pray at the holy mosques of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, what's so great about Ilford?" When faced with Islamic references, the male leaders at the mosque shift gears and say that women in fact prefer to stay home and refrain from sitting on leadership committees. For obvious reasons this logic does not satisfy the women activists who have arrived at the mosque precisely because they *want* to pray inside.

At the end of the documentary, the MPACUK women's committee meets with the leadership of the MCB to discuss the altercations that their campaign caused outside of mosques in the Greater London area. The first generation chairman of the

⁹⁵ See *Dispatches: Women Only Jihad*, Muslim Political Action Committee UK, October 28, 2006: <http://www.mpacuk.org/content/view/2927/34/>.

MCB chastises the MPACUK activists for causing trouble and not respecting the schools of thought that believe women should pray at home and not in the mosque with men. The activists are told, patronizingly, to perhaps “make friends with the elders’ wives” and see if they can improve relations in that manner. Ultimately, the meeting ends in an explosive argument, with the chairman asking the activists why they need women to be on management committees if they are already relegated space on separate women’s committees? The activists go home frustrated, disappointed at the resistance they faced at a meeting with “the Muslim group with all the power in Britain that could really make it happen if it wanted to,” and vowing not to give up their efforts.

One of the lead organizers of the MPACUK’s campaign whom I interviewed explained that the campaign has since made little progress. She blames the resistance on the obstinacy of the male, first generation leaders and, increasingly, their sons:

The mosque is the safe haven for the first generation, and if someone from the outside comes along trying to challenge them, it's going to cause a riot, they won't be having it. And it wasn't just them getting their backs up, they were getting their monkey-grinders, their sons--who are the second generation--who would be saying, 'get lost, a woman's right is not here, go home!'...but it wasn't actually the case, so that made me even more passionate and it made it clear that there was no way in hell I was ever going to listen to any first generation Muslim—what they're saying is nonsense to me, they don't back it up with evidence...And that’s what made

me start studying Islam even more....That's when I found out you can't touch a woman, you can't hit a woman—it's prominent in South Asians, you know, a man can hit his wife, and it's quite acceptable, but in Islam it's not. If a man were to touch a woman, it would be with a feather; and if he were to hit her, it would not leave a mark. It's this kind of stuff that made me realize that Islam is fine, it's these first generation Muslims, I just ignore them. To this day, I still ignore my father.

This organizer refers to the distinction between 'culture' and 'religion' that was discussed in the previous chapter, and stresses the importance of not allowing first generation leaders to impose a form of Islam that she believes they have interpreted through their cultural lens from another society. When pressed on the potential hypocrisy of stereotyping the way violence is "prominent" and "acceptable" in the South Asian community, while aiming to clarify similar misconceptions of Muslim communities, this activist avoids answering directly. Instead, she continues to argue that patriarchy is common in South Asian communities, while textual Islamic interpretation prohibits such behavior.

The frustration that this young activist feels towards the first generation's imposition of non-British culture on Islam becomes obvious when she complains about the use of Urdu in mosques. The same feelings recurrently surfaced in interviews—women were angry that mosques effectively excluded Muslims who were born and raised in the UK and might not be fluent in their parents' native languages (e.g. Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, Bengali, etc.). Both the documentary and the organizer's comments above, however, testify that young, second generation men are increasingly

joining the ranks of their first generation fathers and continuing to keep women out of the mosques they attend. The journalist who reports in the documentary argues that this may have something to do with the fact that second generation Muslim women are now far outnumbering their male counterparts in education, and that these young men might feel that their patriarchal hold on power in the community is being challenged by increasing rates of educated women.

The British campaign uses affirmative frames to challenge the inequitable conditions that women face in mosques—conditions ranging from being denied complete access to mosques to having spaces set aside for women-only prayer in deplorable, unhygienic conditions and no visibility of the main prayer hall. The campaign wants to equalize conditions for women’s participation in mosques, but activists still underline men and women’s distinct roles in the mosque: when male leaders object to their presence as ‘distracting to men,’ activists respond that they are not asking to pray “side by side with men” but “behind men.”⁹⁶ In order to convince their opponents, the male leaders at the mosque, that their campaign for gender-justice will not usurp male power, female activists frame their claims by using Islamic textual references and proposing that women’s participation in mosques will not upset traditional gender relations between male and female worshippers.

Moreover, the activist’s comments above regarding domestic violence were quite common in fellow-organizers’ justification of the ‘proper’ understanding of violence against women in Islam. While the activist acknowledges the injustice of violence against women, her remarks only redresses the disrespect of being gravely injured by something heavier than a feather or by something that leaves a mark. These provisions ultimately fail in challenging the fundamental injustice of men using

⁹⁶ Ibid.

physical force to punish women, or the power relations underlining a man's prerogative to discipline a woman. Given that more transformative interpretations exist (and are quite widely known in these activist communities) regarding the issue of domestic violence, such as the analysis presented in chapter three on the Arabic word *daraba*, it is telling that British activists continue to use affirmative frames (Abdullah 2007; Wadud 2006; Barlas 2002). In view of the argument offered above, that activists turn to affirmative frames to appease their opposition in mosque campaigns, it is likely that affirmative frames are also strategically used to persuade male opposition from not opposing activism against violence in family relations.

B. Gender-Justice in American Mosques

In the United States, the campaign for women's rights in mosques that receives support from CAIR and ISNA also subscribes to affirmative frames of women's rights in mosques. A survey called the *Mosque Study Project*, co-sponsored by these two organizations (in addition to a private Islamic ministry and the Islamic Circle of North America) conducted the largest study of mosques in America in 2000 by randomly sampling 416 mosques across the U.S. The study's results showed that 75% of the mosques' participants were male, 19% did not offer any programs for women, 31% still prevented women from sitting on their executive boards, 53% reported regular participants over the age of 36, and the practice of women praying behind partitions of some sort was increasing (from 52% in 1994 to 66% in 2000) (Bagby, Perl, and Froehle 2001).

Women in Islam, the oldest Muslim women's human rights organization in New York City, decided to take up this issue of women's discrimination in mosques throughout the country and started a campaign to 'reclaim sacred space.' They published a report called *Women Friendly Mosques and Community Centers: Working*

Together to Reclaim Our Heritage, which outlines the problems facing women in Muslim communities throughout the US (relying on qualitative interviews conducted by an organization that co-authored the report, Islamic Social Services Associations, in 2001). The report then makes specific suggestions for mosques to better adhere to the Prophet Muhammad's example regarding gender relations in the mosque. In reading this report closely, not only are there are several similarities between the American Muslim campaign for women's rights in mosques and their British counterparts (particularly regarding the form of discrimination they want to eliminate and the reasons the activists believe the discrimination occurs), but Women in Islam's campaign also subscribes to a similarly affirmative interpretation of the Prophet's teachings and women's role in the mosques.

First, the report makes clear that the campaign would like women to be admitted into mosques' main areas and encouraged to take part in mosques' leadership committees. The authors invoke historical examples, similar to the reinterpretive activism outlined in chapter three, to argue that women's presence in mosques' main space was not only common during the Prophet's lifetime and immediately afterwards, but also vital to gender-justice rulings made during public debates held in mosques:

Sharing the main prayer hall allowed women to fully engage in public debate and influence decisions affecting their lives and the life of the community. For example, when the second Caliph Umar bin al-Khatab wanted to put a cap on dowry, he was challenged by a woman, who stood up in the middle of the masjid and pointed out that his proposed policy violated Islamic law. He conceded and the proposed policy was never

carried out (Khairan 2001: 7).

The report argues that allowing women to participate in mosque life would be an example of proper Islamic behavior and mosque leaders should strive to emulate the Prophet's example. The authors also emphasize the important role that the mosque plays for Muslims in the diaspora, as it does in Britain, as a space where members can meet for community development purposes; excluding women from mosques would exclude them from community activities.

Second, the reasons briefly outlined in the report for discrimination against women also harken back to their British counterparts' distinction between culture and religion. It blames first generation male leaders for alienating women who would be interested in participating in their local mosques and argues that "women perceive that the *khutba* (Friday sermon) must become more sensitive to the language and culture of North America and are not balanced in their context. Gender issues, when addressed in the *khutba*, must be discussed in ways that highlight the differences between culture and religion and recognize the diversity of Muslim women's experience" (Khairain 2001: 11). Just as the British Muslim activists described above were frustrated at the dominance of foreign languages in mosques, American Muslim women also felt that sermons should be delivered in a language (English) that is accessible to youth and women in their communities. When I interviewed the executive director of Women in Islam, Aisha Al-Adawiya, she further stressed the importance of "distinguish[ing] between cultural practices that have nothing to with Islam and Islamic principles themselves."

Finally, the report also invokes the Prophet's sermons that address women and men differentially in the mosques to prove that women were at least allowed inside of the mosques to pray during the Prophet's lifetime:

His guidelines about where women stand relative to men during prayer (in rows behind) indicate that his practice was for women and men to pray in the same room. Out of his compassion for women and children, the Prophet, peace be upon him, would shorten his prayer when he heard a child crying. After the compulsory prayers, he would remain seated for a few moments along with the men in congregation, to allow women to exit the masjid first. (Khairan 2007: 8).

Yet, in no uncertain terms, the report makes clear that “[they] do not advocate that women lead a mixed gender congregation in prayer at a *masjid*” (Khairan 2007: 13). Though the rest of the report argues the importance of having women in leadership positions on committees and as vocal participants in their communities, the campaign stops short of fundamentally challenging the gendered roles of leadership in prayer.

When pressed further about the campaign’s position on the leadership of mixed-gender congregations, Al-Adawiya says:

Unlike Amina Wadud and Asra Nomani, we do not advocate for women leading Friday prayers...[Amina Wadud]’s the only scholar that I know who argues that women are allowed to do that because of the one story during the Prophet’s time where a woman was allowed to lead prayer, and I have to weigh that knowledge with the knowledge from every other scholar I’ve read... I also want to make clear that we understand that real change only happens from within, and I always reference the Civil Rights Movement. There were laws passed in this country

that said you couldn't discriminate, everybody could drink out of the same fountain, you could vote...but how was that implemented and how does it continue to be implemented? It doesn't just happen because a law is passed. So we feel that our approach has been that if we address this issue internally, using our own references of the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions, and not to refer to the creation of the feminist movement...When we do that, we find that those communities that might be more resistant, you have an opening now to discuss what the challenges are. You know, ask what sources say women can't come to the mosque or that they have to be in a separate room? And then it becomes a conversation about what references people are using... and we have the scholarly sources to counter them. It's beautiful, unfolding, and I think it's more lasting that way.

In these comments, it is clear that Al-Adawiya uses an affirmative frame to underline fundamental differences between men and women for strategic purposes. Unlike the opposition that her British counterparts face in male leaders, and the affirmative frames they use to appease this resistance, Al-Adawiya suggests that she does not want to alienate support from the broader community of American Muslim women by using frames that are unfamiliar to their realities. By advocating a less antagonistic interpretation that refrains from alienating the majority of a conservative community (particularly the predominantly male, first generation leadership of mosques, but also the women who have avoided involvement thus far), she suggests that she can gain more support for ultimately pursuing more sustainable change in the community.

C. Transformative Frames in American Mosques

Whereas affirmative frames for gender-justice in mosques appear in both Britain and the US, transformative frames emerge distinctly in the US. The women that Al-Adawiya cites in relation to her disapproval of women leading mixed-congregations in prayer, Amina Wadud and Asra Nomani, are two American Muslim women who have pursued a more transformative interpretation of women's rights in mosques. Amina Wadud was introduced in chapter three as one of the pre-eminent American Muslim Islamic scholars. Asra Nomani, a former Wall Street Journal reporter, began a campaign in 2003 for women's rights to pray in the main hall in mosques after she was told to enter her own hometown mosque in Morgantown, West Virginia through the back entrance and told to pray in a balcony for women where they could not see the main prayer area. While many other activists agreed with the rights to equal entrance and room to pray within the main prayer hall, many withdrew their support from Nomani's campaign when she organized an event in New York City in 2005 where she invited Wadud to lead a mixed-gender congregation in Friday prayers.⁹⁷ Many activists, such as those who constitute Women in Islam's campaign, believed women leading men in prayer to be blasphemous, unnecessarily divisive and counterproductive to gaining broader women's rights in mosques.

Though the event was divisive and fellow Muslims accused her of creating a media event out of an internal community issue (such as Al-Adawiya herself in a later section of our interview), Nomani maintains that it was a necessary public demonstration of the reinterpretation that Muslim women must execute to actually change how Muslims themselves think about women's leadership:

From a media point of view, it was very intentional on

⁹⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/18/nyregion/18muslim.html>

my part to have a public debate and a public campaign because that's how I think you're going to change images and actually push ideas. So if you have a private prayer, like some people who said it shouldn't have been such a public thing... Well, that's great, but that may be transformative for the few hundred people who are there, but it's not a seat change in society.

Nomani is not interested in interpreting the Qur'an or *hadith* in an affirmative manner, as the activists from both Britain and America described above. She is interested in circulating a transformative interpretation that contends that if women are truly equal in the eyes of Allah and the Prophet even allowed a woman to lead prayer during his lifetime, women with the requisite scholarly background today should be allowed--even encouraged--to lead prayer as well. Nomani alludes to the story of Umm Waraqa, who was one of the Prophet's companions, well-trained in the Qur'an and told by the Prophet to lead prayers "in her area;" interpretations still dispute whether her area meant her private household or the public space, yet it is clear that she was held in esteem even as the *imam* of her clan (Ahmed 1992).

The transformative frame of women's rights in mosques appears in Wadud's own Islamic scholarship. As an Islamic studies scholar and the author of a gendered interpretation of the Qur'an called *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, Wadud argues that it is important to not only restrict scholarship to an examination of history for precedent, but that interpretation should also draw precedent from current knowledge and development (Wadud 2006; 1999). Wadud's interpretation of women's rights in Islam are placed with Nomani's at the transformative end of our spectrum because of her use of *tawhid*, the unicity of Allah,

which she defines as “the foundational idea... of an Islamic ethical rationale for reciprocal relations between women and men in all aspects of society: familial, political, and spiritual functions, roles, and contexts.” (Wadud 2006: 168) She uses this concept to argue that we must understand gender relations in Islam as relying on the *tawhidic paradigm*:

[The belief that] constructs a metaphysical triangle... between each of three elements [as] equally essential: Allah, creator of all; one human being (in this case, we will say female); and another human being (in this case, we will say male). Because Allah is creator, however, and not a thing, the function of Allah in this triad is as the tension that holds the other two on a horizontal line of constant equality. Both are of equal significance and neither can be above the other because the divine function establishes their reciprocal relationship. If human beings really are horizontally equal, independent, and mutually co-dependent, each has the same potential for performing any social, religious, political, or economic task. (Wadud 2006: 168)

In this interpretation the two individuals (in this case a man and a woman) are constructed as equals, with the differentiation between one another blurred by the divine relationship that serves as the third, facilitating point in the triangular relationship. If women were assumed to be inferior to men, one could imagine more of a linear construction, where the woman’s relationship to Allah is mediated through the man’s; yet, in this *tawhidic* paradigm, both are equal and Wadud interprets this to imply their equal potential in participating in society--leadership in mosques included.

Though Wadud's transformative interpretation has existed in her scholarship for quite some time, she became an especially controversial figure in the global Muslim community in 2005, when she was invited by Nomani to lead the mixed-gender congregation in Friday prayers. Though she had already led a mixed-congregation in a private prayer service in South Africa in 1994, this event garnered more attention because it was public and the media was invited for the reasons that Nomani mentions above. Wadud herself was displeased with the event's organization and the media's behavior during the service categorically refuses to give interviews to anyone inquiring about the event. A year later, in *Inside the Gender Jihad*, she describes how the content of her sermon (a sermon in which she emphasized gender inclusiveness, the *tawhidic* paradigm, and even referred to Allah by interchangeably using masculine and feminine pronouns) should have been the focus of media attention, whereas all she felt they saw was the physical presence of a woman at the head of the congregation (Wadud 2006).

The event was heavily guarded because of threats that organizers received in the lead up to the service, so protesters who still showed up to claim Wadud and the organizers were defaming Islam were held at bay outside. One of the most common criticisms levied at the organizers was that the presence of women in the mosque would distract men's attention away from God and anything that interrupted that relationship could not be permitted in the mosque. Wadud counters this criticism with her own personal experience leading the prayers and being faced with hoards of cameras as she raised her attention to Mecca at the end of the prayer:

[As] I made my silent prayer of intent and raised my head with my hands at the sides of my face to recite... I was shocked to find cameras and journalists directly in front of

me! This was *not* where I wanted to direct my prayer. As I struggled with this surprising distraction... I was facing the reality that Allah is present in all ways, at all times, and in all places, and all I needed to do was to look with the eyes of my heart and turn my prayer back on track: an act of worship toward Allah. When those who claim a tradition of authority to prevent women from standing in front of men because the men might get distracted, it is the responsibility of the men, prior to the prayer, to consent and then to respond through consciousness of the act of worship and not the incidents of form. So...I took self-responsibility at that moment to remember *what the prayer represents...* and the cameras and the media disappeared before my heart and no longer presented a distraction to my eyes.

Wadud believes that a sense of self-responsibility not only neutralizes the ‘distraction’ argument, but that it should prevent members of the community with traditional authority from misusing interpretation to their advantage. Interpretation is an important tool to Wadud, because it allows Muslims to adapt Islam to current contexts, as the original spirit of the religion intended. Her transformative version asks Muslims to fundamentally challenge interpretations that support certain power relations and the irresponsible practice of Islam--instead of facilitating a divine relationship with God--while affirmative interpretations might in fact contribute to sustaining them.

The same transformative frame has *not* emerged in Britain, as is demonstrated by a direct comparison in which Wadud was invited to Oxford, England in 2008 by a

male Islamic scholar who asked her to lead a mixed-congregation in Friday prayers, just as she had done in New York City three years earlier. The event was very poorly attended, with far fewer than the hundred or so people who attended in New York, and generated a considerable amount of internal criticism from within the female activist community. The vast majority (~90%) of my respondents disapproved of the prayer service and felt that someone from outside the community was imposing her concerns on the British Muslim community. Respondents recurrently argued that British Muslims “didn’t want” to argue that women should be able to lead men in prayer and the Wadud/American Muslim campaign was not representative of their struggle for women’s rights in mosques. The lead organizer from MPACUK, in describing the nature of the campaign’s demands, made clear: “it’s not that we want women *imams* or anything--we just want to be able to pray in the mosque!” The journalist narrating the documentary about MPACUK’s campaign, Tazeen Ahmad, further underlines the affirmative frame of women’s leadership in mosques: “One thing I do know is that a woman can’t be an *imam*, and that’s because she can’t do an essential part of the job, which is lead men in prayers.” She then interviews a female Islamic scholar who has the same scholarly background as many male *imams* and asks whether female and male *imams* can play the same role; the female scholar answers that the role of morally guiding and counseling community members can be the same, but that they should indeed be gender-segregated: “Yes, I could lead women in study circles [or] I could have educational circles, where you can teach women their rights so they can challenge men.” British Islamic scholars and activists may believe that women’s participation should be encouraged and validated in British mosques, yet they stop short of arguing a transformative frame that says women should be allowed to lead mixed-congregations.

III. CASE #2: GENDER-JUSTICE IN STUDENT LEADERSHIP

In all of my interviews with student activists, women credited their university student organizations with the development of their Muslim political identity. The vast majority of respondents voluntarily brought up the terrorist attacks of both 9/11 and 7/7 in Britain, and at least the former in America, arguing that the attacks served as catalysts in encouraging these young women to learn more about the faith that they allegedly shared with the perpetrators. One American Muslim respondent who was a sophomore in college in 2001 explained:

September 11 was an awful tragedy and everyone said that those guys did it because of Islam, and I didn't know much about my religion, just what my parents had taught me growing up. So to answer everyone's questions, and because I was curious myself, I started reading about Islam and educating myself. That's when I found out what it said about women's rights.

This theme recurred frequently in interviews in both countries, and most respondents admitted to seeking out some Muslim student support network during their time at university (with some even recounting high school Muslim student associations in the United States).

While women in both countries claim to have experienced a drive to learn about their religion, after the terrorist attacks, that propelled them into being political activists, the political context in which their identity as Muslim women activists developed diverged. In the United States, the Muslim Student Associations (MSA) were typically celebrated as multicultural 'ethnic' interest groups--hosting Eid dinners, joining minority-coalitions and hosting panels and seminars on 'Muslim' topics. In

Britain, the Islamic Student Organizing Committee (ISOCs) hosted dinners and ‘awareness’ events regarding Muslim topics as well, but they were also the focus of state scrutiny and the well-known target of security profiling.⁹⁸ Students in Britain described a more contentious relationship with the state, where the latter focused its concerns about ‘homegrown terrorism’ on Muslims organizing at universities. The fact that the 7/7 attackers were second generation Muslims and not foreigners as they were in the 9/11 attacks in the US, meant that the state was now suspicious of Muslim youth organizing for political purposes—while some organizations were primarily charitable or social organizations, some were suspected of promoting anti-West opinions and prioritizing their religious identity above their national British identity.⁹⁹ One of the ISOC organizers I interviewed in London explained how upset the Muslim student population was over recent state proposals that would require professors to report “suspicious behavior by Muslim students.”¹⁰⁰ Students were furious that their relationships with teachers would be tainted by distrust and “spying,” making it even less likely that Muslim students would voice opinions or willingly participate in university activities. The British activists recounted their relationship with their government from a much more defensive position than their American counterparts. When asked how these university student organizations dealt with two prominent gender issues *within* their groups--segregation at organization events and female leadership--the experience between the two country’s student activists also diverged.

A. Gender-Justice in British Muslim Student Organizations

⁹⁸ Islam on Campus report.

⁹⁹ See descriptions of the British state’s *Preventing Violent Extremism Fund* in previous chapters that explain the state’s suspicions of ‘homegrown terror’ and its *Prevent* agenda that tries to tackle such threats to national security.

¹⁰⁰ See media coverage that confirms the allegations:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/mortarboard/2006/oct/16/spyingonmuslimstudents>

In Britain, ISOCs are the local chapters of the Muslim student organizations that come together to form a national organization called the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), which was founded in 1962 to coordinate existing ISOCs. I spoke to local female ISOC organizers from a number of universities in London, Manchester, and Birmingham, as well as female organizers working for FOSIS in London, and learned that gender relations in these student organizations overwhelmingly perpetuated an affirmative interpretation of how men and women should treat one another in meetings and at their events. For instance, when I inquired about a recent poll that was published in London called *Islam on Campus: A Survey of UK Student Opinions* and its consistent references to the concept of ‘free mixing,’ my respondents overwhelmingly argued that their young male counterparts felt much more strongly about retaining gender segregation, and women most often just let them enforce such rules.

‘Free mixing’ in the UK refers to idea that men and women are allowed to associate or integrate freely; its challengers argue Islam frowns upon such interaction, deriving evidence from *hadith* that described how the Prophet’s wives were kept physically separate from the rest of society, using veils or curtains. It is also the same *hadith* that is used to advocate veiling, as was discussed in detail in chapter two. In the case of free mixing, the logic is the same: if women must be kept separate, then they must not integrate with men. Examples of gender segregation can range from separate seating for men and women on either side of an aisle, to a more extreme form that allows men to voice their opinions freely in a meeting, yet requires women to write their comments down on a piece of paper and submit it to the ‘Head Brother’ to read outloud on their behalf.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ The ‘Head’ Brother is the leader of the entire student organization, while the ‘Head Sister’ is the leader of the women’s committee or subgroup; usually ‘Head Sister’ also

The poll reported that a significant number of young Muslim men *and* women were against free mixing in general, which surprised a number of respondents. According to these activists, they knew of gender segregation existing at student events but they believed women were less in favor of the segregation than they were willing to challenge the male leadership. One activist found the results so surprising that she challenged the poll's methods: "[It] really makes me wonder what sort of women were being interviewed here? Certainly not the women I've come across...they don't usually have an issue and it's usually men who find it very uncomfortable to mix." Even though these results surprised many respondents and some expressed disapproval of the practice of gender segregation, only a minority of women said that they would challenge rules that forbid free mixing, with the vast majority arguing some derivation of the logic: "it's just the way it's done."

British activists seem to use affirmative frames of gender segregation—frames that a) underline the difference between men and women by keeping them in physically distinct space, b) assigns the male group with distinct 'privileges' members earn by simply being male. One of the additional privileges that males benefit from these frames is the automatic appointment of 'Head Brothers' as Presidents of the ISOCs. While the Head Brother is elected by the men, and the 'Head Sister' is elected to represent a women's committee or subgroup, the Head Brother also represents the entire organization as President, while the Head Sister is made his subordinate as Vice President.

When I asked about gender segregation in leadership positions, activists became more apologetic, in contrast to their reactions to questions about free mixing. A national student organizer with FOSIS argues that women were doing more important

serves as the Vice President, subordinate to the exclusively male President ('Head Brother').

work, even if they were not on the executive committee:

FOSIS [has] certain committees that are headed by girls as well [but] a lot of people point to the executive committee...Honestly I don't think the executive committee is important. Regional committees are where the important work is happening and they're headed by sisters as well...but some local ISOC male leaders would feel uncomfortable talking to a female on the executive board, so it's just more practical.

She believes it is more important that women's contributions to the community are not devalued, and leadership becomes more of a symbolic, logistical contribution. By supporting this androcentric organizational structure (that uses men as the point of reference and underlines separating women out as a 'different group'), these activists underscore an affirmative frame of leadership in Islam. They frame women's rights in a way that redresses disrespect ("Regional committees are where the *important* work is happening and they're headed by girls" [*emphasis added*]), but they do not challenge the structural inequality that limits women to a subordinate position in leadership.

B. Gender-Justice in American Muslim Student Organizations

In the United States, in contrast, all student activists used transformative frames when discussing gender segregation in participation and leadership. They argued that gender equality in leadership was no longer an important struggle for Muslim Student Associations (MSA) in America, with one activist claiming "it hasn't been an issue for a long time." MSA is a national organization that has both regional coalitions and local chapters by the same name. MSA National was founded in 1963 at a conference

of Muslim students from across the United States and Canada. Since then, it has served at the center of a largely decentralized organization, trying to encourage horizontal networking among its federal chapters, but allowing them great discretion over their individual activities.

In contrast to the state of female leadership in ISOCs and on the executive committee of FOSIS in Britain, MSA chapters and MSA National have both had female presidents. I interviewed two of the past MSA National female presidents and asked how female leadership was handled in their organization. The first female president (2004) argued that she was well respected and her leadership was not contested. She admitted that there were MSAs who still struggled with the idea of female leadership, but she believed it happened because of the “conflation between the religious role and administrative role,” where the leader’s potential responsibility in leading prayers caused debate over whether women could lead a mixed-congregation in prayer (a controversy I discuss above).

This conversation about the association’s occasional struggle with female leadership eventually reminded the same student activist that she had experienced trouble herself before becoming MSA National’s president:

Actually you just reminded me, but in my MSA this happened. At Florida State University, I was incredibly active and my second year I was nominated to become the president of the school’s MSA. And I specifically remember this, because it was pretty crazy: we had this Salafi group of international students, and when they saw that I was the only person nominated... they nominated a guy who was Nigerian, straight up from Nigeria...[he] wasn’t active in the MSA at

all, but they wanted a male and they just mobilized enough votes to get him in... The same thing had happened two years before me, and [the female candidate] actually won, but they had done the same thing to her. That year they actually brought in a ton of guys from the local mosque who never come to meetings or anything just so that they'd have votes to get her out... Anyway, my second year this guy was president, even though my [girl]friend and I were running the entire organization.

The tension between the international Muslim students and the second generation Muslim students that this activist described was by no means an exception. Four other women I interviewed remembered similar stories from their own university experience at schools across the country and then recounted tales of their friends' experiences and stories they had heard second-hand. One woman from Miami described having to start an alternative Muslim student organization, because a group of male Wahabi foreign students from Saudi Arabia had commandeered the MSA and excluded women from participating at meetings or voting for leadership. She proudly describes how she was joined by other women from the original organization and they formed a group where women were active participants and she served as its first president. She believed her organization symbolized a generational divide, given that they were joined by some of their second generation male peers who were also disillusioned with the foreign students' leadership. She noted, however, that while some second generation men joined her alternative organization, some others became active in the Wahabi group and even started organizing with the radical Islamic group, Hizbut Tehrir.

The challenges to gender equality, however, seem to be largely restricted to

conflicting beliefs between foreign and American Muslim students. For the most part, American MSAs seem to have incorporated more women into their leadership ranks and activists were surprised to hear that their British counterparts were not leaders in ISOCs. The MSA National also uses a more transformative frame of women's leadership rights than its British counterpart, FOSIS. While the FOSIS representative argued that leadership titles mattered less than activists' substantive work, a female MSA National president thought that having a woman in such a high-profile position at the national level helps women on the local level: "I've visited campuses and local chapters and had sisters come up to me and say that they feel they can speak up more and the brothers take them more seriously because they see a woman as the Head president now." By fundamentally challenging the assumption that men should be the ultimate leaders, these female presidents apply a transformative frame to gender-justice in student organizations that claim women's equal membership should translate into equal leadership as well.

IV. CASE # 3: GENDER-JUSTICE IN LGBT ORGANIZATIONS

Lest we think that the two cases above might simply demonstrate that transformative frames only emerge in the US in regards to female leadership, I examine a campaign that concentrates on a different topic entirely: gender-justice for the Muslim LGBT community in both countries. As the last chapter discussed activism surrounding domestic violence and family law, and the heteronormative position of how a woman's sexuality should be regulated in the private sphere, this section examines another debate over sexuality in the Muslim diaspora to see if activists differ in their interpretations by national context. The 'management' of homosexuality in Muslim communities might be one such topic; though there is

incredibly scarce empirical data on this community, there is enough research to suggest that LGBT Muslims are engaged in an interpretive project that has some notable similarities to the non-LGBT women activists I discuss in the rest of my dissertation.

Homosexuality is largely considered rejected by Islam, based on popular understanding of the Story of Lut (similar to the Story of Lot in Christianity). In the story, Allah disapproves of the Cities of the Plains' looting, idolatry, and lawless behavior and sends Lut as a prophet to the town to warn them to behave in honorable and just ways. The townspeople do not heed Lut's warnings and mock him for his teachings so Allah sends angels down to Earth to destroy the town. Lut takes the strangers in as his guests, compassionately feeding and sheltering those in need; but the town's men arrive in hostility at Lut's house, demanding that the strangers be turned over so that they may 'solicit'¹⁰² their guests. Lut refuses, even offering his own daughters instead, yet the crowd persists. The visitors interject, reveal to Lut that they are messengers and tell him to leave immediately with his family, and never look back, in order to be saved from the destruction that they would visit upon the rest of the town. Lut flees with his wife and two daughters, though only Lut and his daughters escape safely, since the wife looks back and turns into a pillar of salt (Jamal 2001). Popular understandings interpret the homosexual intentions of the towns' men as the sin that brings destruction upon the town.

There are two types of LGBT Muslim activism that have emerged in the West around protecting LGBT individuals from the condemnation, exclusion and sometimes fatal violence they face in the Muslim community for coming out. The first type

¹⁰² For a detailed discussion of this verb see Jamal (2001), but for this discussion's purposes, the translation should be understood as describing the desire to rape Lut's guests.

mobilizes behind the Muslim identity and emphasizes that LGBT individuals can be just as devoted to Allah--they are minorities, but ultimately “they were made by Allah,” and Allah is infallible, so how could they be wrong? The second type of activism speaks more to the interests of this chapter, because it uses hermeneutics as an interpretive strategy to claim that the Qur’an never actually condemns homosexuality in the Story of Lut (or anywhere else in the text, for that matter). Since my field research does not include any self-declared LGBT Muslim individuals, I cannot provide qualitative evidence that there are interpretive differences between British and American LGBT Muslims, but the history and evolution of activist organizations and discourse in both countries around homosexuality in Islam suggests that, were we able to conduct more research, we might expect similar outcomes as the two cases discussed above

The basic interpretive strategy that LGBT Muslims in both communities seem to use problematizes the assumption that the sin responsible for the town’s destruction is necessarily homosexuality. Analyzing the town’s history, a more contextual reading suggests that Allah was more disapproving of the selfishness, greed, and inhospitality running rampant in town. Scott Kugle, an American convert and former professor of Islamic Studies, argues that it would be more logical if these traits were the reason for the town’s destruction, because women and children were also destroyed by Allah; if Allah had meant to punish individuals for their homosexual intentions, then he would have saved those who had no part in such behavior (Kugle 2003).

Kugle uses this hermeneutic strategy to argue that anti-gay interpretations of Islam are in fact misinterpretations of Islamic texts, taken out of context. Kugle calls this type of interpretive strategy ‘semantic analysis’ because it looks at clusters of words as they are physically placed next to each other, but he argues that there is

another interpretive strategy as well: thematic analysis. This strategy looks at the Qur'an as a collection of motifs and themes that cannot be read in a linear format, and seeks to situate themes in context to the other locations where their mention appears in the Qur'an (Kugle 2003). Kugle's approach is joined by Amreen Jamal's (2001) analysis of the Story of Lut for gay rights specifically, and with the reinterpretive scholarship of Amina Wadud (2006) and Asma Barlas (2002) on gender issues broadly speaking, as described in detail in chapter three.

Kugle provides evidence for his argument by locating comparable passages in the Qur'an that purposely demonstrate a sense of absurdity in interpreting the Story of Lut as an anti-gay narrative. He presents the story of the prophet Salih as an example: Salih was sent by Allah to the People of Thamud to tell them that a certain camel had been made sacred, meaning they should care for the animal, allow it to wander freely, and eat and drink on anyone's land. The camel was meant to symbolically represent the weak and vulnerable members of society—if people could care for the camel, they would demonstrate their ability to care for members at the margins of their society. But the townspeople ridiculed Salih (like the people of Lut), slaughtered the camel, and then Allah destroyed the town with an earthquake and 'choking clouds.' Kugle contends that anyone who takes this story to mean that the people of Thamud were punished for hating camels would be sorely missing the point. Similarly, he argues, homosexual behavior is not at the core of the Story of Lut, but violent rape and inhospitality are at real fault.

This hermeneutic interpretive strategy has a transformative air to it because it tries to use contextualization to challenge fundamental assumptions about the Qur'an's mandates. A transformative frame becomes particularly evident when Kugle argues that Islamic societies have historically accepted and condoned homosexual behavior

(before there was even a term for it in the West, in fact). This not only justifies homosexual behavior by saying it ‘must be tolerated since there is no punishment outlined to deter its practice,’ but it goes one step further to suggest that heterosexuality should no longer be assumed as the point of reference in the text or Islamic traditions. The differentiation between genders is interpreted as a deconstructable idea, as gender relations are blurred and demoted from being necessary truths.

Even if this scholarly interpretation qualifies as transformative by our criteria, how do activists organizing behind LGBT identities interpret the topic of homosexuality in Islam? There is evidence that suggests some American activists might be *slightly* more likely to follow transformative interpretive strategies than British activists. In 1997, a gay American Muslim male named Faisal Alam had a near mental breakdown trying to reconcile his faith and sexual identities; while he was recovering he decided to reach out over the internet and seek out others who might be having the same difficulties. People responded immediately and a support network was born over a confidential listserv. The listserv grew into an organization called the *Al-fatiha Foundation*¹⁰³, which eventually developed the capacity to host international conferences for LGBT Muslims.

In 1998, the *Al-Fatiha Foundation* traveled to London to organize an event for British LGBT Muslims and a gay Muslim named Adnan Ali, who had fled his home in Pakistan for fear of being persecuted for his sexuality, decided to found its British chapter (Al-fatiha UK). Under Ali’s leadership, the British organization seemed to operate as its American counterpart—it provided support through networking online and resources describing the hermeneutic-based scholarship discussed above; its

¹⁰³ mention how Al-Fatiha means the opening to the Qur’an

members avoided apologizing for being both gay and Muslim; and they complained about traditional views that heavily regulated sexuality. Eventually, however, the Al-Fatiha UK chapter evolved into *Imaan*, a new organization that still aimed to serve as a support network for British LGBT Muslims, but one that framed gender-justice and homosexuality differently. *Imaan* developed a reputation for arguing that open and prideful behavior is contrary to Islam and that one cannot be proud of one's sexuality in Islam.¹⁰⁴ The organization was taken over by LBT Muslim women who, in contrast to Alam and Ali's 'proud and out' stance in public, show up at British pride marches in *niqab* (full face and body veil), arguing that the British homosexual community should adopt more modest behavior. While members of the American Al-Fatiha Foundation disguise their identities at Gay Pride marches, activists argue that this happens because they are concerned for their safety, not their modesty.¹⁰⁵ Because there is a remarkably limited amount of empirical research (with the exception of Andrew KT Yip (2004; 2005; 2006; 2008) in the UK who conducted the first large sample quantitative and qualitative study of LGBT Muslims in the West), it is hard to draw conclusions about the different frames that LGBT Muslim activists use in the US and UK. However, the analysis above suggests that activists' interpretations of sexuality might be slightly more transformatively inclined on the American side because of its tendency to embrace sexuality in a way that challenges tradition and counters heteronormative assumptions in the Qur'an. Further research would obviously be needed to discuss this particular form of activism and its parallels to the types of gender-justice activism that I discuss elsewhere in this dissertation, though

¹⁰⁴ See the Channel 4s documentary about *Imaan*: *Gay Muslims*, 2006.

¹⁰⁵ See media coverage of the Gay Muslim contingent at the 2007 Gay Pride Parade in San Francisco: MacFarquhar, Neil. "Gay Muslims Find Freedom, of a Sort, in the US." *The New York Times*, November 7, 2007:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/07/us/07gaymuslim.html>

such questions are beyond the scope of this chapter.

V. CONCLUSION

These three cases have demonstrated that while gender-justice activists in both Britain and the US may employ affirmative frames in their campaigns, transformative frames seem to emerge exclusively among American Muslim activists. Given the similarities between the two countries' activists, what might account for the variation in the use of transformative frames?

One explanation could be the disparity in socio-economic standing between British Muslims and their American counterparts. The lower rates of education and employment among British Muslims might mean that British Muslim women activists are more socio-economically vulnerable and unable to afford alienating themselves from their family and community support networks. My research findings suggest, however, that this is an unlikely explanation, because respondents' affirmative frames do not correlate with lower income or educational levels. The following statements that employ affirmative frames of gender-justice issues were all articulated by highly educated, middle-class activists:

I thought to myself, 'God is not unjust' and that's when I started exploring, not as in I want to practice it, but just that I wanted to know Islam's viewpoint is on it. That's when I found out that Islam gives women more rights than it gives a man—we have more freedom, we have more respect. To an extent, we're quite spoiled, because we don't have to wake up in the morning at five am and go pray sunrise prayers—we can

just do whatever we want and pray at home. We don't have the same obligations. --*Teacher, 25, UK*

Sometimes I think people don't have the full understanding so they think ok my husband has the right to do this to me, do that to me. Which is true, you know, because as Muslim women, the Muslim man has a certain amount of authority over the Muslim woman, but that's not to say that we're not equal or it's not balanced, because if you tallied up the rights of a man and the rights of a woman in two columns, they'd be equal, just in different proportions. Ultimately the tally would be the same... it's like for example, a woman can bear children but a man can't. Physiologically, we have certain rights that a man doesn't... In god's eyes, we're equal.

--*Council-worker, 27, UK*

For instance, you look at inheritance and you say, yeah, ok, it's not equal, it's not the same, men are being told well you get 2 portions and a woman gets 1. And you think, well, that's really unfair. But then when you look at the context of the society that that is being revealed to, what women are supposed to have within that society, whatever their assets are they're supposed to have complete freedom over it. And a man has legal obligations to look after all the women in his family, so

his wife, his mother, his sisters, whatever it is. Whatever he gets through inheritance must be used, obviously the proportion would vary, but must be used for the women, whereas the woman can do what they like. So if a father passes away and he's told to pass on 2/3 to his son and 1/3 to his daughter, it's likely because the son will be using more to look after the daughter and the mother and whoever's left. --*PhD student/Lawyer, 29, UK*

If it is not a matter of class composition or socio-economic mobility, another explanation might point to the different composition of each country's Muslim community: perhaps immigrants tend towards the affirmative frames, whereas indigenous Black Muslims in the US skew gender-justice activism toward the transformative end of the frame spectrum? Scholars studying African-American Islam in the US suggest that this is an unlikely phenomenon as well. Sherman Jackson (2005) describes the Black Muslim population in the States as being largely Salafi, because of the way Salafi Islam's "staunchly 'protestant' approach resonates with the generality of Blackamerican Muslims." He admits that this marriage between Muslim radical conservatism and Black Religion can often lead to liabilities, "particularly regarding issues affecting women" (Jackson 2005:54). This does not suggest that all Black Muslims are conservative on gender issues; in fact, a number of Black Muslim women are leading gender-justice struggles just like those of second generation Muslim women. It does, however, indicate that the Black Muslim community does not naturally tend towards the transformative end of interpreting women's rights in Islam.

The next chapter will discuss alternative explanations in more detail, but it should be noted that if individual level variables do not seem to influence the variation in frames, then it seems likely that there are other national context variables at work. I

will next explore this notion in detail, by examining each state's distinct historical relationship with religion, religious freedom, and individual rights. These divergent histories have helped create dissimilar political opportunity structures, or a set of institutional arrangements, that either empower (in the case of America) or impede (in the case of Britain) religious activism among second generation Muslim women.

CHAPTER 5
THE BRITISH STATE'S ENTANGLEMENTS WITH RELIGIOUS
COMMUNITIES

I started off this dissertation by explaining that my research confirms two main levels of argument. First, despite the remarkable differences across the Muslim communities of Britain and the US, we see a similar population of second generation women from these communities who mobilize for gender-justice issues by employing similar activist strategies; the differences across the two groups of women's socio-economic socialization alone make the similarity in activist strategies that much more striking. But within these similar strategies, as we saw in the previous chapter, there is still diversity. The ways in which activists frame these campaigns vary from women who want to rectify gender inequality, yet still underline difference between men and women, to women who aim to rectify gender inequality *precisely* by challenging the underlying system of gender relations. And, notably, we notice the latter frames emerging exclusively in the United States. Given all the other similarities between both British and American second generation Muslim women's activism, why don't we see the same in Britain?

It is this variation that generates my second level of argument, and forms the basis of this chapter. I argue that the variation between the American and British Muslim women's different experiences with transformative frames is due to the fundamental differences in each country's set of institutional arrangements concerning religious freedom. I claim that the historic role of religion in Britain effectively disenfranchizes British Muslim women from experimenting with transformative frames, while in America a strong Constitutional cultural tradition that emphasizes

individual rights (particularly the right to religious freedom) enables the religious activism of some of their American counterparts.

The historic role of religion in Britain has made the state suspicious of religious leadership, while its role in America has encouraged the state to try and refrain from intervening in religious community affairs as much as possible. While this chapter demonstrates that the British state's reservations trace back to its historical relationship with the Church of England, I focus on the impact these doubts have had on the state's contemporary relationship with its Muslim religious leadership. The British state has tried to limit the radicalizing effects of Islamic clerics on British Muslims—particularly *young* British Muslims—by engaging in a set of institutional arrangements I call *religious corporatism*, where the state chooses 'moderate' Muslims to represent the Muslim community and tries to regulate the Muslim identity through these appointments. Because these leaders are almost exclusively male, this system effectively edges Muslim women out of constructing the Muslim identity in Britain.

Jonathan Laurence (2010) offers the theory of religious corporatism, arguing that the state chooses this approach as “a mechanism for securing a community's respect for state authority” (149). Ironically, however, my research suggests that this approach *de-legitimizes* the state in the eyes of many Muslim women leaders. A close analysis of the councils that Laurence includes in his argument reveals that the Muslim interlocutors appointed by the state are predominantly first generation males. Second generation women leaders are effectively ignored in relations with the state, while their elder males are allowed to construct an androcentric, primocentric Muslim identity—not only for the public, but to also represent the community's interests to the state. These brokered relationships turn elder male leaders into formidable representatives of the Muslim community, while women activists and their gender-

justice claims find little support. In order to avoid both alienating potential support from women in the broader British Muslim community and obstructive opposition from male leaders, activists frame their gender-justice claims without challenging the underlying system of gender relations.

But how does a state make the decision to engage in or refrain from a system of religious corporatism? I argue that each state's distinct approach to handling religious diversity stems from the historical role religion has played in each country's national narrative. The British state's distrust of religious authorities leads it to implement a system where it believes it is in command of religious identities, precisely by choosing *who* gets to represent religious communities. The American state, in comparison, attaches great importance to its Constitution's first amendment rights to religious freedom and minority protections and refrains from lionizing certain religious leaders as representatives of the Muslim community. Instead, Muslim organizations and activists are left to compete in the public limelight, allowing more individual renegades to voice their transformative frames (even if many still turn to affirmative ones). The American state's deferential relationship towards religious freedom, and reluctance to intervene in religious affairs, creates a political opportunity structure that enables transformative frames for gender-justice claims to emerge among second generation women's activism in the American Muslim community. In this chapter I argue that the British set of institutional arrangements stemming from a deep distrust of religion does not allow the same political opportunity structure to emerge for its British Muslim women activists.

Before beginning my argument, I engage with a pair of alternative explanations for the variation in frames within activists—class stratification and feminist cultural traditions that vary between the two countries. I demonstrate that neither explanation satisfactorily rationalizes the variation, but I draw on the idea of

distinct cultural traditions to investigate how the different emphasis placed on individualism and equal rights in the American national narrative might affect its activists' actions.

Next, in order to demonstrate the British state's ultimate desire to regulate religious communities, I first conduct a discourse analysis of the British debates to abolish blasphemy law. A close examination of these debates confirms that the state repealed these laws neither out of deference to non-Christian communities (who were not protected by the laws) nor out of regard for the freedom of expression, but to assert the state's rightful role in maintaining public order and its independence from religious authorities. Whereas laws against (Christian) religious offense were initially developed to maintain public order in a society where the Church constituted the social fabric, the contemporary British state now tries to define public order itself; this public order also involves regulating religious representation.

Accordingly, I next provide a brief, but comprehensive, review of Laurence's (2010) argument that several European states have similarly turned to a system of religious corporatism to assert control over its growing Muslim communities. While Laurence argues that this approach invests the state with additional authority and perceived control in the state-religion model, I explain how this approach only further delegitimizes the state in the eyes of Muslims by imposing *who* will represent the Muslim community. I demonstrate that second generation Muslim women activists distrust the state because of the exclusive relationships it brokers with select male interlocutors from their community, and this leads them to strategically fight to reclaim Islam using less divisive affirmative frames for their gender-justice claims.

Finally, for the sake of comparison, I examine how the American state approaches the right to religious freedom, made most evident through the recent controversy over whether an Islamic community center and mosque should be built

near the site of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York City. This episode also centers on the idea of offense, but in contrast to the British debate that asked whether religious communities should be protected from *offense on religious grounds*, the American debate asks whether the right to religious freedom can be restricted if its *religious practice offends others*. I ultimately argue that the American state's position on religious freedom and commitment to individual rights constructs a political opportunity structure that is more conducive to American Muslim women's religious activism than the British state makes available to their British counterparts.

I. ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Given that this chapter attempts to explain the difference in frames that emerge among activists in America and those that emerge in Britain, it might be useful to first engage with two alternative explanations for this variation and explain why they, alone, are not satisfactory. First, differences between each country's Muslim populations are often ascribed to the variation in class composition that I mentioned in my first chapter. Given that the predominantly working class composition of the British Muslim community was different enough from the largely middle class composition of the American Muslim community to categorize the two groups as different systems in my research design, it makes sense that we should interrogate whether this divergence in socio-economic status is responsible for the diverse frames that emerge among activists. Nonetheless, I was unable to detect any class stratification in the frames that emerged in either Britain or America. Such an explanation might theoretically expect working class activists to use affirmative frames for three reasons: 1) lower levels of education might not generate the critical thinking that produces transformative frames; 2) working class activists might be more likely to live in joint family households, where they feel less comfortable challenging underlying gender relations; or 3) perhaps working class activists will use affirmative

frames so as not to alienate women in the community who might be similarly restricted by these SES circumstances.

In both countries, however, I failed to uncover correlations between class and frame usage. In fact, both middle and working class activists in the two countries not only found affirmative frames appealing in their own campaigns, but also resisted examples of transformative frames that I inquired about in our interviews. At the end of chapter four, I briefly mention that lower levels of education and employment do *not* correlate with either affirmative or transformative frames. In fact, the vast majority of my respondents were well-educated, meaning that lower levels of education could not be at fault for choosing affirmative frames.

To be clear, the transformative frames that I observed amongst American Muslim activists were employed by women from a mixture of class backgrounds as well. For instance, Nomani's campaign to integrate mosque leadership was strongly resisted by upper-middle class Muslim women in the Morgantown community, as depicted by the *Mosque in Morgantown* documentary. A gathering of women watched the controversy's news coverage and engaged in a conversation on camera where they accused Nomani of being out of touch with the community and misunderstanding what true gender equality means in mosques. What is more, the American Muslim Islamic scholar who employs transformative frames to lead mixed-gender congregations in prayer, Amina Wadud, is herself from a working class background (see chapter four).

Additionally, the joint family living situation is common across class status, as the second generation in Muslim immigrant families in both countries often lives with their parents until marriage—and, even then, often move into the husband's family home after marriage. The majority of activists in both countries also commute to local universities for higher education, while living at home. Living situations, therefore,

seem to have little to do with class stratification in this community. Activists do, however, mention that they did not want to alienate women in the broader Muslim community by conveying gender-justice claims in a way that was ‘too unfamiliar’ or failed to relate to their daily concerns (see below). In this sense, affirmative frames were used regardless of activists’ class background, in order to attract the support of women who were not gender-justice activists themselves. I will discuss this strategic approach further below.

A second alternative explanation proposes that the difference in cultural traditions between the feminist movement in the United States and its counterpart in Western Europe explains why American women’s rights activists would be more likely to employ transformative frames than British women’s rights activists. In a volume of essays comparing the feminist movement in the United States and Western Europe, feminist scholars argue that American public opinion emphasizes the role of individual effort in rectifying gender equality (Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Hastings and Hastings 1986). Contributors make the claim that mainstream feminism in the US is fundamentally liberal in its tenets and is less hesitant than its European counterparts to find allies ‘within the system.’ American feminists focus on individualism and equal rights and have used political opportunity structures to even ally with political parties and institutionalize the struggle for women’s rights (Costain and Costain 1987). American Muslim women’s rights activists, then, might experiment with transformative frames that emphasize equality between the genders because the American feminist movement demonstrates a strong cultural tradition of autonomy and equal rights and endow women’s rights activists with confidence.

Yet, this logic falls short for two main reasons. First, the American liberal feminist movement is not *transformative* in the way that my respondents employ transformative frames—namely, it is known to underline the differences between the

genders, precisely in order to rectify inequality by inserting women into traditionally male-only institutions; challenging the underlying structure of gender relations was instead attributed to America's radical feminists. Second, my respondents largely resist any association with either country's mainstream feminist movement. As I demonstrated in chapter three, respondents feel that the Western tradition of feminism is orientalist and a less appealing framework for women's rights than the Islamic tradition. It is unlikely, then, that the select American Muslim feminists who employ transformative frames to make gender-justice claims derive their ideas from the American feminist movement.

It might be possible that American Muslim activists could unconsciously derive ideas from American mainstream feminists, despite their forthright disregard for the movement; however, a piece by another contributor to the same volume compares feminism in the United States and Germany and holds promise for a better explanation. Myra Marx Ferree examines the different historical experiences that have given different directions to the feminist movement in each country and concludes that feminists in the United States focus "on shaping a definition of equality that is consistent with the prevailing liberal conceptualization of equality as identical rights" (Ferree 1987: 189). She argues that American feminists of the nineteenth century founded their arguments for women's access to education, property and other rights on the liberal premises embodied in the Declaration of Independence.

Ferree's argument implies that there might be a cultural tradition dating further back than the advent of American mainstream feminism that not only gave birth to mainstream feminists themselves, but also might be responsible for influencing the American Muslim women activists who experiment with transformative frames. The dominant American political tradition, as Ferree argues, is classical liberalism, which emphasizes self-determination and individual rights. These political ideas are

embedded in the country's founding documents and imply that a *Constitutional narrative* of American history might influence its various activists and the frames they use to make their claims.

This chapter makes the claim that a number of American Muslim women's rights activists employ transformative frames to make gender-justice claims because they have a different historical narrative and national context to appeal to in their struggles. While it must be made clear that not all American activists employ transformative frames, it is notable that none of the transformative framing I observed emerged among British activists' campaigns. In order to make sense of this disparity, I portray the American Constitutional narrative as a 'toolkit' from which feminists can select elements they believe will help their claims.

Anne Swidler proposes the idea that culture forms a 'toolkit' or cultural repertoire of habits, skills and styles from which people construct strategies of action (Swidler 1986). While traditional sociological treatments of culture assume it shapes action by determining how people value things around them, leading them to act by means that obtain those ends, Swidler believes that culture can actually have a more direct causal role in shaping action because it provides individuals with a certain set of capacities which they can selectively use to act in ways they believe might lead to ends they desire.

I argue that the American Constitutional narrative constitutes this toolkit or cultural repertoire from which activists can select an emphasis on equal rights and individualism to make gender-justice claims through transformative frames. According to Ferree, it is likely that American mainstream feminists also draw from the same toolkit. Swidler is careful to note, however—and I concur—that just as culture should be understood as a heterogeneous, dynamic term (see chapter three), it should be clear that not all individuals select the same capacities from their toolkit.

She clarifies: “A culture is not a unified system that pushed action in a consistent direction. Rather it is more like a ‘tool kit’ or repertoire from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action” (Swidler 1986: 276). This qualification helps explain why some American Muslim activists experiment with transformative frames while others continue to employ affirmative frames—the former are those women who reach into their American toolkit and select aspects of the Constitutional narrative that emphasizes equal rights and individualism; the latter derive their gender-justice claims primarily from their religious foundation, making their frames similar to those of their British counterparts.

The implications of Swidler’s research advise scholars to pay closer attention to the interaction of culture and social structure. For instance, do certain historical junctures or sets of cultural symbols give rise to certain strategies of action more than others? This chapter takes its cue from this question, as I argue that the historical American Constitutional narrative leads to a set of institutional arrangements that respect individual rights and the right to religious freedom; it is this interaction between culture and social structure that, in turn, enables religious activists in the US to experiment with transformative frames while the absence of such a cultural tradition in Britain leads to a more restrictive set of institutional arrangements.

II. BRITAIN’S STATE-CHURCH MODEL

The British state’s relationship with the Church of England dates back to Reformation, when King Henry VIII severed relations with the Roman Catholic Church because the Pope repeatedly refused to annul Henry’s marriage to his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, so that he could remarry and try for a male heir. Henry passed the Act of Succession and then the Act of Supremacy in 1534, ensuring that the

monarch of England would be the supreme head of the new Church of England.¹⁰⁶ As the established church, the Church of England enjoys the exclusive law-making privilege of twenty-six seats for bishops, including the two Archbishops of Canterbury and York, in the House of Lords. The Church of England was also the only religion protected under Britain's blasphemy law until they were ultimately repealed in 2008. This section first briefly explains why blasphemy law were established in the 16th century. Next I move on to a close examination of the parliamentary debates to abolish blasphemy law to demonstrate that the state wanted to repeal the laws to assert its control over religious authorities.

A. Blasphemy law

Scholars who study the history of blasphemy law in Britain argue that they were established to protect offense against the Church of England because to offend the Church was to threaten the very moral fabric of society (Nash 2008, 1999; Jones 1990). In the seventeenth century Lord Hale famously argued that blasphemy law preserved civil order: "To say, religion is a cheat, is to dissolve all those obligations whereby the civil societies are preserved, and that Christianity is parcel of the Laws of England; and therefore to reproach the Christian religion is to speak in subversion of the law."¹⁰⁷ Civil order was based on religion—Christianity in particular—so a critical view of religion implied subversive tendencies towards the state as well. Blasphemy was considered a challenge to all forms of authority, and, as David Nash (2008) argues: "the State and its relationship with established religion became fused in a partnership that guaranteed respect for religion and the monarch/prince" (Nash 2008:

¹⁰⁶ http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/cofe/cofe_1.shtml.

¹⁰⁷ Taylor's case. (1675). 1 Vent. 293. 3. Keb. 607, 621.

440). Individuals who were brought up on charges of blasphemy were effectively brought up on charges of sedition.

Two common challenges were repeatedly raised against the blasphemy law. Though some legislators still argued that “the Christian religion holds a special place in the social and Constitutional fabric of the nation” and must be guarded from offense because “the protection of society is achieved by ensuring that the Christian religion is treated with respect,” many critics argued that the blasphemy law explicitly discriminated against Britain’s non-Christian faith communities. One faith community, they argued, could not be subject to more protections than others. Religious leaders from non-Christian communities, particularly Muslim leaders, petitioned for the extension of the laws to protect all individuals from offense on religious grounds.

The second challenge was made by secularist advocates, as well as the European Commission on Human Rights, and argued that blasphemy law violated liberal rights to the freedom of expression; as a member of the Council of Europe, of which the ECHR is a part, Britain was periodically reminded that it could not be a champion of human rights around the world with such laws on their own books. In spite of both of these legitimate criticisms, however, the state chose to repeal the law based on the primary argument that blasphemy law was irrelevant, because they had been ‘abrogated through disuse.’ The last public prosecution invoking the law was made in 1922 and the last private case was taken in 1977; yet, if preventing blaspheme was so crucial to preserving public order, critics asked, then why were cases so far and few between?

B. Challenging Blasphemy law

In 1989, the controversy over Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* shone a spotlight on the privileged relationship between the state and the Church of England that the blasphemy law's critics had already questioned for some time. Some Muslim male community leaders found the book to be blasphemous to the Islamic faith, for a variety of reasons, and called for the book to be banned. They were joined by some Muslim leaders in the Middle East—most prominently by the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who issued a *fatwa* on Rushdie. While the majority of Muslims in Britain refrained from taking a public stance on the book, a number were enraged enough to take to the streets, burning copies of the novel.¹⁰⁸ The frenzy eventually even led to an attempt at a private blasphemy prosecution. In *R v Chief Metropolitan Stipendiary Magistrate ex parte Choudhury* (1991), a Mr. Choudhury asked the court to expand the blasphemy law to protect religious offense against Islam. Choudhury accused the state of discrimination against minority faiths and of partiality towards those of the Christian faith. The court ruled that the blasphemy law could not be expanded to other faiths, not because it held the Church of England in such high esteem—the ruling, in fact, admits that the current laws discriminate against minority faiths—but because it ruled that the logistics alone of incorporating more faith communities would be impractical.¹⁰⁹

Muslim leaders were asking to expand the blasphemy law because they fundamentally supported a continuation of the privileged relationship between religious communities and the state (Hellyer 2007; Koenig 2005). A continued link between the Church and state meant that the government would continue to recognize

¹⁰⁸ Leonard Williams Levy (1995) argues that much of the hysteria in Britain over the book's publication was incited by an international network of extremists funded by Saudi Arabia.

¹⁰⁹ See the UK government's "Select Committee on Religious Offences in England and Wales, First Report," 10 April 2003: <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/ld200203/ldselect/ldrelof/95/9515.htm>.

religion as an important identity, and was, after all, better than the secularist multiculturalism option of not recognizing the positive role of religion in the public sphere (Modood 1994). But Muslim leaders interpreted this ruling as the state's blatant nepotism towards Christianity, at the expense of minority communities.

In fact, however, the manner in which the blasphemy law were repealed in 2008 substantiates the government's disdain for its institutionalized relationship with religion, including the Church. The debates over adding a clause abolishing the blasphemy law occurred in the House of Lords in March 2008, in the House of Commons in May later that year, and quickly received the Royal Assent which recorded the law to history.¹¹⁰ Opponents of abolition in both parliamentary debates argued that it would send anti-Christian signals to a majority-Christian society already made vulnerable by growing religious diversity, which they equated with pursuing the disestablishment of the Church of England. Although the amendment's proponents repeatedly said that they were neither anti-Christian, nor trying to accomplish the disestablishment of the Church, the state does, in fact, seem to have made an attempt at disestablishment—if disestablishment is taken to mean that the state is considered to be the ultimate authority maintaining public order, and is no longer dependent on the Church to do so.

A discourse analysis of the debates reveals that proponents generally relied on three main arguments. First, proponents argued that international norms frowned upon Britain's enduring blasphemy law. As a signatory to a number of international conventions, they argued, the UK had to acknowledge that blasphemy law marred "what is otherwise an excellent record on combating discrimination and promoting human rights."¹¹¹ The UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion specifically

¹¹⁰ See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1942668/Blasphemy-laws-are-lifted.html>

¹¹¹ Cite Baroness Andrews, Lords debate on the clause to abolish blasphemy law, an Amendment to the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill 2008, 5 March 2008.

expressed concern at the continued existence of blasphemy law in Britain, and questioned whether these restrictive laws undermined the country's position to criticize discriminatory laws in other countries. A Liberal Democrat proponent argued that a letter he wrote to the media to argue that the Sudanese Government's blasphemy law was unjust, in relation to the "teddy bear" case in 2007, was undermined by this outdated law: "We have our own version. Whether or not it is used, that undermined our case."¹¹²

The blasphemy law is discriminatory, according to the European Court of Human Rights, but the discrimination is suffered by those who wish to use their right to freedom of expression. Discrimination against non-Christian minority communities is only mentioned in passing, by proponents who want to drive home the idea that such laws are outdated in an increasingly diverse, multicultural society. Not a single member of either the House of Lords or Commons mentions that discrimination against minority faiths could be solved by simply expanding the law to cover other religions as well—this is surprising considering opponents of abolition were joined by Muslim leaders' who supported the continuation of blasphemy law if they it was expanded to cover Islam.

Taken as a whole, the international norm argument appeared to be the weakest argument put forth by proponents, because, ultimately, opponents repeatedly argued that they were not convinced by international law. When a proponent cited the example of the United States to argue that maintaining a single state Church would not help cohesiveness, claiming "religious life flourishes far more in the United States,

¹¹² For more information on the teacher who was arrested and jailed for blasphemy in Sudan for allowing her class of 7 year olds to name a teddy bear Mohammed, see: http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/newsenglish/witn/2007/11/071126_sudan.shtml. For the parliamentary debate comments, cite Dr. Evan Harris, Commons Debate, May 6, 2008.

and some say that it is no accident that that country has no state Church,” an opponent countered by deriding international examples: “He may be right, but it is also not an accident that people who wanted that went to the US, and that people who did not stayed here... We have to remember our culture, tapestry and traditions and not just those of other countries.”¹¹³

The second and third arguments for abolition more accurately portrayed the state’s desire to establish control over public order. The second argument proponents made argued that the laws had long been abandoned in any case and that their continuation undermined the state’s efficacy and reputation. Both members who introduced the amendment on their respective parliamentary floors argued that “the law has fallen into disuse and therefore runs the risk of bringing the law as a whole into disrepute.”¹¹⁴ To support their case, they explained that no public prosecutions had been brought since 1922 and the last private prosecution was a case in 1977. One member argued that the sprawling gaps between uses proved the irrelevance of the laws—“There was hardly a rash of prosecutions before 1922. I have been able to find only two cases. The first was in 1676... hard on the heels of that event, there was one in 1841... it was 80 years before the law was invoked again...when we say that the law has fallen into disuse, perhaps we should really say that the law has never been found to be usable.”¹¹⁵

In response, however, conservatives argued that the failure to employ the laws was due to the scarcity of political will to use them, not due to any failure in the laws themselves. One member argued “there is a distinction between what is usable and what is used” and blamed the government for failing to acknowledge the significance of these laws in maintaining an orderly society. Given that proponents indicated that

¹¹³ House of Commons debate.

¹¹⁴ Cite the 2 debates.

¹¹⁵ Cite Baroness Andrews, Lords debate, p 2.

the lack of political will spanned the last three decades (denoting a lack of will across different party governments), it may be precisely the lack of political will to enforce blasphemy law that proves their irrelevance to contemporary societal interests.

On July 11, 2002 a rowdy protest calling for the abolition of the blasphemy law, gathered thousands of people for a reading of James Kirkup's poem, *The Love that Dares To Speak Its Name* on the steps of Trafalgar Square in London. Activists chose this day because it was the 25th anniversary of *Gay News* magazine's conviction for publishing the same poem—the last private prosecution in 1977. Activists even directly challenged the state in its protest propaganda, yelling for police to “arrest us or abolish the blasphemy law!”¹¹⁶ Yet, despite the fact that the poem portrays Jesus Christ engaged in graphically detailed homosexual acts with his subordinate, and Christian activists called for the state to prosecute the readers for religious offense, the state refrained from action. One of the lead activists, Peter Tatchell, declared it was a good day for free speech rights: “We have won an important victory for free speech and the right to protest...No one was arrested. The police didn't even take our names and addresses. The blasphemy law is now a dead letter. If the authorities are not prepared to enforce the law, they should abolish it.”¹¹⁷ While his dreams of abolition would take another six years to realize, the Trafalgar incident signals that the state was indeed lacking in political will to protect the Church of England from offense. And if the political will to execute a certain law was missing, the law simply served as an empty threat that undermined the state's authority in keeping public order.

The third reason that proponents gave for abolition also concerned the state's reputation and perceived efficacy. Proponents argued that new legislation protected individuals on grounds of religion and belief, in an all-inclusive way that did not

¹¹⁶ Cite <http://www.petertatchell.net/religion/blasphemy.htm>

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

discriminate against non-Christian faiths, and made blasphemy law redundant. This reason stands out as the state's chief argument not only because it is referenced most in the debates, but also because it demonstrates a temporal justification for why the laws are finally repealed in 2008. Baroness Andrews, when introducing the amendment in the House of Lords, explained that debates over abolition had taken place in parliament for the past 22 years, but that "the opportunity has been taken in this Bill, because it was appropriate and timely to do so." The timeliness to which she refers was the political opportunity structure created by the accumulation of new legislation that addresses religious identity.

Religious identity was not traditionally incorporated into legislation addressing race relations. Unlike the US Civil Rights Act of 1964 which names religion alongside race as identity groups that form 'protected classes,' qualifying members of those groups to protection from discrimination, religion was not automatically considered alongside race in Britain. Instead, it took years of lobbying the state, much like the controversy over blasphemy law during the Rushdie affair, to persuade the state that offense against religious identity was just as important as offense against racial or ethnic identities. Ultimately, existing legislation did not recognize the religious identity until September 11, 2001 convinced British politicians that the Muslim identity was not one they could continue to ignore. The Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act of 2001 was introduced immediately after the attacks, and one of the measures replaced 'racially-aggravated offenses' with "racially or religiously aggravated offenses" in some parts of criminal law,¹¹⁸ perhaps suggesting that state efforts to counter terrorist activity would not enable religious profiling of the Muslim community (though expanding police powers demonstrated otherwise).

¹¹⁸ See Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill 2001, Part 5: Section 38-39.

In addition to this security legislation, legislation against discrimination in the provisions of goods, facilities and services was amended to include discrimination on the grounds of religious belief. While the Race Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations of 2003 makes it illegal to discriminate against a person on the grounds of religious belief in the areas of employment or vocational training, the Race Relations Act 1976 had only made it unlawful to discriminate against a person in the provision of goods, facilities, and services in the area of public functions on the grounds of their race. Though the RRA included protection against discrimination on grounds of color, race, nationality and racial or ethnic origin, religious belief was not included. Subsequent case-law even extended this protection to Jews and Sikhs, recognizing them as specific ethnic groups, but religious groups such as Christians and Muslims were still excluded.¹¹⁹ Finally in 2007, the Equality Act was amended to extend protection on the grounds of religion and belief to provision of goods, facilities and services, the disposal and management of premises, in education and in the exercise of public functions.¹²⁰

The new legislation deemed most important by proponents of abolition was the Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006, which legislated against inciting hatred against a person on the grounds of their religious belief. This act not only underscored the two prior legislative extensions to religious identity, but it also secured the support of key religious leaders with the Church of England. Kay Goodall (2007) explains that

¹¹⁹ Cite assessment for expansion proposal.
http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:MM43P7UvD5kJ:www.berr.gov.uk/file/s/file23097.pdf+goods,+facilities,+services+religious+belief+discrimination+uk+assessment&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESiAjGfvc1vyzieAcQoTRL2IYk-D97kWLXDOG9LA4EzR42Y_Q50ICDCn2mMH3oq1IXHQR8B9FBG5oYgtlyqSBwWyIoCtXkb7Npn2tg6jtPVZEtW2m7Q3Dtaka3aTFP3GSDwtXzye&sig=AHIEtbRWeL7gvs3CW537aVKqFk1Cx-Mg9g.

¹²⁰ Cite Equality Act of 2007.

this legislation is the culmination of six attempts in Parliament since the mid 1990s to make incitement to religious hatred unlawful.

Goodall addresses what could be called the ‘racialization’ of religion, in describing the contemporary efforts to expand incitement to racial hatred legislation in Britain to include incitement to religious hatred. She admits that religion and race have been treated differently for some reasonable reasons: “Race, for most people, most of the time, is indeed clear and fixed. Religious affiliation, in contrast, is often less easily discerned by others and is not immutable” (97). However, she argues, religion often does the work of social organizing that race performs: “Religion, too, needs to be understood both as faith and as social category—as a way of marking out groups. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, sectarian conflict is between two groups who use religion mostly as a social category: it is not a battle of faith between devout believers” (98). Given that ‘Muslim’ has become a term of abuse in Britain, and is often used as shorthand for ‘non-white,’ anti-Muslim sentiment can indeed be interpreted as racist.

Goodall concludes, however, that the legislation requires such a high threshold—particularly the proof of ‘intention’ to incite hatred—that it renders the legislation practically useless and unenforceable. Her analysis suggests the state pursues the legislation for symbolic measures, rather than effective protective purposes. Yet the same government in 2008 refers to the Act as the main reason blasphemy law should be abolished. Proponents of abolition recurrently referred to the redundancy created by both laws, and the more expansive protection that the Act provided to non-Christians as well. Baroness Andrews, while introducing the amendment, argues that the incitement legislation “recognizes a more complex and diverse society, which respects those of faith and those of none.”¹²¹

¹²¹ Cite Baroness Andrews.

The central role of the testimony given by Archbishops sitting in the House of Lords, however, indicates that the state was more strategically interested in winning their support than using the legislation to protect people on the grounds of their religious belief. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York wrote a joint letter to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, which was repeatedly cited by proponents, saying: “Having signalled [*sic*] for more than 20 years that the blasphemy law could, in the right context, be abolished, the Church is not going to oppose abolition now, provided we can be assured that provisions are in place to afford the necessary protection to individuals and to society.”¹²² The incitement legislation was precisely what the religious leaders cited as their assurance that people of religious belief would be protected. Proponents finally had support from crucial allies to abolish laws that they believed undermined the state’s authority.

The 2008 debates represent the state’s opportunistic attempt to abolish blasphemy law at a particular moment in time when blasphemy law had fallen out of use and new legislation had made it redundant. The new legislation also convinced leaders with the Church of England to finally give abolition their legislative ‘blessing’ or support. Historically, the state had allied with the Church to establish stability and eventually even built institutions based on Christian values because they reflected the interests of the vast share of society. The main purpose behind blasphemy law had been to maintain order, as defined by the Christian faith. Even the Archbishops’ letter admitted that “the real purpose of the offences is the preservation of society from civil strife, rather than the protection of the divine or any particular religious beliefs” in a society whose fabric was “formed through the operation of the Christian faith.”¹²³ But now it had become clear that the government wanted to replace the laws that

¹²² Cite Lords and Commons debates.

¹²³ Ibid.

continued its entanglement with the Church of England with legislation that allowed the government control over defining public order. Proponents of the new incitement legislation had never really intended to protect religion itself, which was revealed beyond a doubt by a Liberal Democrat's testimony in the Commons:

We in the House worked hard to narrowly defeat the Government to ensure that the religious hatred laws did not protect opinion or religion, but only, in clear and narrow cases, individuals from incitement to hatred. I did not for one moment think that those laws would be cited by the Government as something to reassure the archbishops.¹²⁴

Though the MP claims that proponents of abolition did not want the incitement legislation to represent state interests in protecting religion, the Labour government strategically allowed religious leaders to believe the new legislation would protect people from religious offense so that the bishops would, ironically, support the abolition of laws that bound the state to the Church of England.

III. BRITAIN'S STATE-MOSQUE MODEL

The British state's aim to assert control over religious leadership is not confined to the Church of England. With a growing Muslim population and increasing concerns about religious clerics' abilities to radicalize British Muslim youth, the state is concerned about regulating the Muslim community as well. A forthcoming analysis of State-Islamic relations in Western Europe, written by Jonathan Laurence (2010),

¹²⁴ Cite Dr. Evan Harris, Commons debate.

argues that various Western European states institutionalize Islam Councils to regulate the developing Muslim identity in their countries. In Laurence's story, instead of abolishing blasphemy law, the state institutionalizes what he calls Islam Councils. These councils range from formal commissions to more informal advisory groups, but their purpose is the same: they advise the government on Muslim community needs. Ironically, while abolishing blasphemy law arguably disestablished the institutionalization of Christianity, Islam Councils practically institutionalize Islam. This section first describes Laurence's theory and then moves on to argue that his critical oversight of Muslim women prevents him from understanding how the state has, in reality, delegitimized its authority among leaders of the British Muslim community.

A. Religious Corporatism

Laurence argues that a system of religious corporatism actually reflects a stronger state, and should not be misunderstood as the state caving to religious community interests. Laurence effectively applies neo-corporatist theory to the pressing problem many Western European countries face: when countries opened their countries to Muslim migrants in 1960s-1970s, expecting migrants to return home, a series of economic shocks in the 1970s convinced migrants to stay and petition to send for their relatives, creating family reunification legislation. Now that the migrants' children are coming of age and we are beginning to see the second generation (and even third-generation in some places) participate politically, Western European countries must learn how to incorporate a growing community that organizes behind a Muslim religious identity into state-religion models that were historically based on the state's relationship with Christianity.

Whereas other scholars treat this entanglement as an indicator of the state's weakness and a dangerous signal that religious systems could control politics,

Laurence believes that the state deliberately uses accommodation policies as a “mechanism for securing a community’s respect for state authority” (149). Although by recognizing group difference the state reconstitutes the very group borders that it seeks to dissolve with the rights of liberal citizenship, Laurence argues that the state does this deliberately and its “public recognition for these and other interest groups can be seen as a moral response to the representative insufficiency of parliament in the modern state” (161).

The state wants to establish public order, and reigning in religious identities that could challenge individuals’ loyalty to the state is seen as a crucial step in the process. Laurence cites Rousseau’s argument in *Social Contract* that religious duties might interfere with loyalty to the state. Both majority and minority religions are worrisome, because Rousseau believed that “at every turn they await an opportunity to usurp state sovereignty.” If the state was to remain sovereign, it would have to regulate religion. But, just as blasphemy law were only abolished once Christian religious leaders believed the state was acting in the religion’s interests, the state uses the Islamic Councils to regulate the Muslim identity under the guise of seeking their input in government affairs.

Laurence does a remarkable job of finding similarities across five Western European countries’ approaches to accommodating growing Muslim diversity. He explains how the countries followed very similar pathways to managing their relations with Islam, breaking down the evolution of these relations into two stages: first, there was Embassy Islam, an approach where the state favored foreign governments of Muslim majority populations and allowed them to control their diaspora populations in the West to a considerable extent. As Laurence notes, this is a less relevant approach in Britain because the majority of its Muslims are Pakistani migrants, and Pakistan was the not the sort of Islamic-controlled state that Embassy Islam involved.

In any case, as it became clear that Muslim migrants were not going to return home, the role of foreign governments in state-Islam relations became less desirable and the various states moved on from Embassy Islam.

The second stage, Political Islam, is where the British case rejoins Laurence's argument. Political Islam was made up of Muslim federations that focused on domestic affairs and conducted themselves in English, which the state took as an indication that they were serious about settling in the West. At first, these organizations' leaders still exhibited what Laurence calls an "old country" mentality that is "reminiscent of the tensions between government-sponsored religion and Islamist political parties in North Africa and Turkey...[and the leaders were] confrontational with public authorities and made maximalist demands for religious accommodation in the public sphere" (252). Eventually, however, these federations demonstrated more of a willingness to cooperate with state-Islam consultations, because they felt the influence they could exert through being *included* in state-consultations would be greater than protesting or lobbying from the outside.

Laurence argues that European states went through two phases of state-Islam consultations. The first phase in Britain formed the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in 1997 to serve as the single interlocutor for the government. The organization was allegedly founded as the result of several years of broad consultation with over 250 British Muslim organizations, and was even planned as an improvement upon the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs—a group that was made of Muslim diplomats and professionals to represent Muslim interests after the Rushdie affair in 1989 (Laurence 2010: 214). The government's heavy involvement in the group's formation and with the organization's agenda is evidenced by press reports of leaked memos.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Laurence cites Policy Exchange memos, cited in annex to Bright, *When progressives treat with reactionaries*:

This first-phase proved untenable as the group's members could never agree amongst themselves and members of the broader Muslim community began to doubt the group's independence from the state.

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, followed by the attacks in Madrid and London, the British state felt a new sense of urgency to try the state-Islam consultative approach again. The second attempt tried the neo-corporatist model once more and tried to make it appear as though the representatives were chosen by the Muslim community itself:

The Home Office asked the four leading Muslim organizations to help constitute the founding membership of "Preventing Extremism Together" in the weeks after the London bombings of July 7, 2005... After some jockeying by participants and internal confusion regarding the board's hierarchy, the Home Office established a steering committee for the Mosques and *Imams* National Advisory Board.

Other scholars argue that the process of convening this consultative group was more complicated than Laurence's account. Jonathan Birt (2006) explains that some members thought the process was "tokenistic" from the beginning, saying that the state had rushed the process through the holidays and pre-empted their work with a "raft of measures...completely counter to reducing alienation and extremism."¹²⁶ The Preventing Extremism Together (PET) taskforce produced a report in November 2005 that argued the key solution to tackling extremism was to first battle a series of issues that disproportionately affected the Muslim community in Britain, particularly

the British state's flirtation with radical islamism, 2006.

¹²⁶ Cite p. 701 quote from Jonathan Birt 2006.

inequality, discrimination, deprivation and foreign policy. However, Arun Kundnani (2009) argues that by April 2007 the government had launched its official *Prevent* program, with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and effectively ignored the recommendations made by the taskforce. Instead of addressing systemic problems plaguing the Muslim communities, the state opted to pursue terrorists, protect infrastructure, prepare emergency response services, and *prevent* people from becoming terrorists.

The government reasoned that “communities stop terrorism” and shifted the responsibility for solving problems in the Muslim community to Muslims themselves. The Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund was set up so that the DCLG could delegate funds to local organizations and authorities who aimed to tackle radicalism in their communities. While the original PET taskforce made thirty-seven recommendations, only three initiatives were taken up by government and two of these were concerned with training ‘good *imams*’ that would encourage concepts of civic religion among British Muslims (Birt 2006: 701). The rest of the taskforce’s recommendations were consigned to mere concerns, instead of priorities.

While Laurence demonstrates that the leaders of federations have adapted their behavior to the neo-corporatist political opportunity structure, moderating their demands and trading in obstructionist positions for more pragmatic stances, my research suggests that not all Muslim leaders have responded favorably to the state’s approach—particularly Muslim women leaders. The state’s main challenge in organizing religious corporatist arrangements is *who* will represent the Muslim community, and the state overwhelmingly chooses first generation male leaders for these negotiations. Muslim women, in fact, are nowhere to be found throughout Laurence’s analysis. The key element that he overlooks in his entire argument is the fact that the state’s approach to religious corporatism *definitionally* excludes women,

as long as it uses consultations to justify training *imams* and monitoring mosques, given that chapter four explains that female *imams* have not emerged in Britain. If, as Laurence argues, “the commonality of these State-Islam consultations is that they are held with the delegates of prayer spaces, large mosques and Islamic religious federations,” then the interlocutors the state works with are exclusively male.

B. Incorporating Women Under a Securitization Agenda

In Britain’s case, while Muslim women activists were not pleased when the state began brokering exclusive relationships with male leaders in their community with the advent of the MCB in 1997, the state’s securitization agenda after September 11, 2001 only worsened their situation. Now instead of the state explicitly ignoring Muslim women, activists explained how they were insincerely courted by the state to be token representatives of the Muslim community. Katherine Brown (2008) looks at the impact of the state’s securitization agenda on women’s participation in mosques and argues that this state agenda actually undermines its efficacy in the Muslim community: “the British Government’s instrumental use of the gender issue is likely to have negative ramifications in the long run for women’s rights by undermining certain ‘progressive’ groups within the Muslim community. Specifically in policy terms, it is also likely to undermine current counter-radicalisation [*sic*] activities” (Brown 2008: 472-3).

The campaign for women’s rights in mosques, which I describe in some detail in the previous chapter, is a good example. Brown argues that the state’s securitization agenda, post September 11, 2001—which intensified after the arrest of Richard Reid and the July 7, 2005 London bombings—focused on the mosque as a site of socialization in the Muslim community.¹²⁷ Laurence similarly argues that the state’s

¹²⁷ Brown’s argument that the mosque plays a central role in Britain’s state-Islam relations is corroborated by other scholars, particularly by Jonathan Birt (2006) who

religious corporatist approach not only believed that religious leaders in mosques were natural brokers, but it also tried to train selected leaders as representatives of the community. It is clear in Brown's story that Muslim women activists believe that the state is at fault in brokering these relationships with men, at the expense of Muslim women. She cites one activist from the Women's Resource Centre who explains how women were excluded from the table:

From our own experience, we really had to fight to be involved, they don't automatically consider us, they usually go to the male-led religious groups. Women's groups have little funding, no premises, the men tend to have the Mosques, they are automatically considered, which I think is really discriminatory, so the Government is guilty of this itself.¹²⁸

When the state's strategy finally turned to women, it tried to expand religious corporatism to include women representatives of the Muslim community. First, the approach tried to insert women into mosques as 'deradicalizing' agents of a sort. Second, the state formed an advisory group of women, similar to Islam Councils, with the main agenda of exposing and exterminating extremism in their families and communities. Both the state and Muslim groups supported the idea that women perform a distinctive role in their families and faith communities. Baroness Uddin stated: "Muslim women have a vital role to play in public life and their participation has always been prominent in Islamic history. Encouraging the role of British Muslim women as a source of moral authority through their influence within families and communities is a key to unlocking the disenfranchisement and disillusion of Muslim

argues that the state has constructed the image of the 'good *imam*' to help manage Muslim diversity.

¹²⁸ Cite p. 485 quote from Brown.

youth in the UK” (as cited in Brown 2008: 481). The state began to equate the presence of women in mosques with the deradicalization of Muslim youth, so it began to promote mosque reform that called for reduced foreign influence on staff and the integration of women. Mosques that failed to comply risked being closed down (Brown 2008: 480).

As the previous chapter notes, women activists run into resistance from their first generation male elders, or *babas*, as Brown refers to them. Male leaders see the mosque as their distinctive space, a unique position from which they can lead their regional communities. Brown explains that “it is likely that those who run mosques will see this campaign as part of a wider strategy to undermine traditional authority structures rather than as an ‘Islamic’ protest against cultural innovations” (486). In interfering in with the women’s campaign, the state makes it more difficult for women to gain access to spaces led by increasingly defensive and insecure male leaders.

A greater concern to women activists, however, is how the state’s approach to religious corporatism effectively undermines their authenticity and credibility among other Muslim women. This concern is precisely why British Muslim women activists use exclusively affirmative frames in their gender-justice campaign. In terms of the campaign for women’s rights in mosques, Brown explains that “as the campaign becomes increasingly associated with the government agenda of integration and counter-radicalization it loses credibility and authenticity in Muslim communities because it is no longer about ‘Islamic’ injunctions and identities” (486). The credibility that activists want to maintain with the larger community of Muslim women depends on their ability to relate the campaign to women’s routine lives. When asked how she felt about Amina Wadud leading Friday prayers, a 23 year old activist from Lancashire disapproved of her approach. She thought it was “too confrontational and away from what women are familiar with... Muslim women

leaders need to keep common Muslim women in mind and not force them out of their comfort zones too quickly, because there will only be backlash and it will be counterproductive.” The state damaged activists’ credibility within their communities, making women turn to prudent frames for gender-justice, but efforts did not stop with mosque reform. Soon the state decided to take its approach to religious corporatism one step further and set up an advisory group of Muslim women. Paradoxically, what Laurence argues is supposed to be the state’s strategy to assert control and win respect from the community only backfired and undermined the state’s authority within the larger community of Muslim women.

C. National Muslim Women’s Advisory Group

Encouraging women’s participation in mosques did not work like the government wanted it to—the state faced resistance from Muslim males and even females for interfering in communal affairs. In January 2008, the Secretary of State for the Department for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears, launched the National Muslim Women’s Advisory Group (NMWAG).¹²⁹ For all intents and purposes, the group fits Laurence’s criteria for an ‘Islam Council,’ as a group that the state established because of its religious corporatist approach, except that this group was comprised exclusively of Muslim women—19 prominent Muslim women activists from across the country, to be precise.

The group was launched with PVE funds to advise the government on how to tackle extremism. The state agenda for the advisory group specifically asked these women to be on guard and report problems and the suspicious behavior of young males in their communities. The department went so far as to organize training modules that hired actors to play disturbed young men, and taught women in the

¹²⁹ See Casciani, Dominic. “Muslim women advise on extremism” *BBC News*, 23 January 2008: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7203925.stm.

community through role playing workshops how to engage with such scenarios.

When I interviewed women who sat on the advisory group, a minority of women praised the state for finally reaching out to Muslim women. One group member credits the government with highlighting Muslim women's voices in diverse political debates, effectively expanding its religious corporatist model to include women as well:

We have access...we go into the House of Lords and House of Commons, we speak to the Prime Minister... this is what Britain has done for Muslim women....They've literally put Muslim women in leadership positions, where they speak to ministers around issues of media, education, about employment, their concerns about foreign policy, they've spoken to the Foreign Secretary about Gaza, so the government has created that platform for Muslim women to raise those concerns.

The majority of respondents I interviewed, however, argued that they had to commandeer the group as a platform from which they could make their opinions heard on state matters—from domestic social service reform to foreign policy and wars abroad—because Muslim women's voices were not sufficiently represented elsewhere in British politics.

Critics among fellow Muslim women activists (who had either refused to sit on the group or had not been invited) rose concerns about the state using the group to spy on Muslim communities; one activist who declined the invitation even called the advisory group members the state's "puppet women." Another activist accused the

group of neglecting serious concerns that Muslim women faced and being too short-sighted to focus on any community issues beyond employment: “We felt that they’re not looking holistically...we also felt that they were saying the Muslim community is at fault and that we should sort ourselves out. No, we are citizens. We are British and you are our government. You are supposed to help us and support us, you have to take responsibility for your failures to us as well.”

Nonetheless, there was a consensus among members themselves that sitting on the group did not necessarily tie one to the government’s agenda— in a dire funding climate, the members’ organizations needed funds that they would split between their causes, and they developed three main modules independent of the state’s securitization agenda: 1) they would send strong women role models to speak at Muslim schools, 2) they would conduct political leadership training workshops for Muslim women who were interested in running for public office, and 3) they would organize progressive theology seminars that encouraged woman-friendly interpretations of the Qur’an and Islam. All of these modules were in their infancy at the time of my interviews, but their establishment indicates that activists were not simply willing to be co-opted by a state that had previously ignored Muslim women’s concerns by exclusively backing male leaders in their community. They would highlight the socio-economic needs of the disproportionately disadvantaged Muslim women and children in their community and agreed to sit on an advisory group that allowed them to allocate state resources to their projects.

In April 2010, one of the group’s leading members, Shaista Gohir, resigned because she had become “disillusioned with the initiative.” In a public letter to the new Secretary of State of DLGC, John Denham, she explained that the group had

become ineffective and failed to empower Muslim women.¹³⁰ She argues that the group was poorly conceived from the beginning:

When the group was first formed, I was uncomfortable with the mechanisms used to select group members. We were handpicked by civil servants and government advisors which resulted in a lack of diversity and raised questions about our credibility. I continuously raised concerns about the lack of diversity of the group.¹³¹

She goes on to explain that she had expressed concerns about the empowerment of Muslim women being “linked to the ‘prevent agenda’” and her concerns were repeatedly ignored. By linking the NMWAG initiative with the ‘preventing violent extremism’ agenda, the state prioritizes securitization agenda at the expense of Muslim women’s true needs:

Muslim women are one of the most deprived groups in the UK. They suffer from the highest levels of economic inactivity, worst health; and face discrimination on multiple fronts ...It is clear that the government should be engaging with Muslim women anyway to find ways to ensure they have equal life chances as any other group. Despite initial reservations about linking Muslim women to the prevent agenda, I supported it in the

¹³⁰ In 2009, Hazel Blears was one of the Labour MPs caught up in a scandal over embezzled funds and stepped down from her post.

¹³¹ The complete letter is posted at <http://wallscometumblingdown.wordpress.com/2010/04/08/founder-quits-national-muslim-womens-advisory-group-in-protest/>.

expectation that it could act as a catalyst to empower women attempting to tackle the many wider issues that impact their daily lives. Having been on the NMWAG for over two years, I now feel the initiative was a political fad.

In my interview with Gohir in 2009, before her resignation, she had a much more optimistic outlook on making the most of what she already admitted seemed to be a flawed process:

It's been very slow. We should have done more, but it's not the fault of the women, it's the fault of central government... I think it was set up to tick a box really. I'm not happy about it being under the PVE... but if the chance is for Muslim Women to be empowered, I say take advantage of the opportunity... I'll criticize the government if I don't agree with it, but I don't believe in criticizing the government just for the sake of criticizing them. Because in the end if the government thinks that no one appreciates the good that it does, it'll be counterproductive for the Muslim community... You can be really far away from corridors of power and shout and scream, [but] are you going to make a difference or influence the government? The answer is no. I would rather get near to the corridors of power... I'm only going to make that difference if I engage with them and talk with them and get involved with them.

Over the last year, however, Gohir was unable to retain this hopefulness and lost faith in the entire initiative. In her resignation, she argued that the state should not centralize its relations with only a certain set of Muslim representatives—particularly when the representatives are hand-picked and do not represent the diversity of the community. She suggests that the group be disbanded and for the state to engage with multiple organizations instead:

As NMWAG has failed as an initiative, they should not be promoted as the only or main channel that other government departments should engage with. I feel the best way forward is for all government departments to tap into the wide array of Muslim women's organisations and individual community activists across the UK and engage with women with the relevant knowledge and expertise on the issue concerned. Such action will result in more Muslim women gaining access to decision makers and the government increasing the diversity of women with whom it engages with.

Just as the state's religious corporatist approach had originally excluded Muslim women by designating first generation male leaders as the representatives of the community, NMWAG was yet another attempt at religious corporatism that failed to incorporate diverse women's voices.

D. Muslim Women's Contentious Relationship with the British State

The ramifications of combining the state's new securitization agenda with its approach of religious corporatism signaled to the broader Muslim community that the state distrusted most Muslims as extremist threats, and only trusted a select few

representatives to speak for their interests. Young Muslims already only felt loose associations with ‘Britishness,’ but after the attacks young Muslims were put on the defense, with the public skeptically questioning whether someone could, in fact, be both British *and* Muslim. A prominent 23 year old student activist explained that the government singled out Muslims at university, asking professors to report students’ suspicious behavior:

Around [the] time of the 7/7 bombings there was a lot of government legislation around spying. [Society X] addressed this issue of spying within student groups and university crackdowns... They also brought the Islam Channel which did an open discussion ... it was about our feelings in regards to government legislation and how we'd feel if lecturers were spying on us. We were against it because how are they going to determine if you're an extremist? We felt like it would be sandbagging us--would they say you're an extremist if you frequented the prayer room too much? Or the way you dress? It would have completely ruined the relationship that we have with our lecturers.

Other students in the same age bracket (those who were in university at the time of the London bombings) agreed that the government was singling out Muslim youth and making the public question whether second generation Muslims had allegiance to the British state.

When I asked respondents why they still felt it important to identify as Muslim, particularly in a hostile political climate that, they argue, targets this precise

identity, one 28 year old student activist summed it up nicely:

I think people have snapped out this delusion [that] when you're born in a western society you're given this sort of notion that we live in a democracy and it gives everyone equal rights, etc. But since these 7/7 bombings, there has been an increase in persecution, for example, with police stopping Muslims for no reason, [and] with the removal of rights and secret trials...All this outward attempt to suppress the identity makes us think, hold on why are they oppressing us? So maybe you look into it more. And maybe you learn that there is a system called Islam that does not conflict with democracy [and] that does not conflict with your day to day life, in any way whatsoever...In the end, you think 'I am going to prove that. I can contribute to society and I can be a good Muslim.' And it might be easier to be part of an Islamic community than a Western community, because the latter is very fickle, one day you're incorporated in[to] it [and] the other day you're not. Either you're a freedom fighter or a terrorist. [But with Islam] your main bond is with God and God does not reject it you. And there's no one greater than him. So I think there is more security with religion than there is with people.

These sentiments recurred in other interviews with the same age group--namely, the

disillusionment with the state's failure to protect their interests (as Muslims, but more specifically as Muslim women) and the subsequent turn to Islam as an alternative model for women's rights.

It is this disillusion with the state's approach that make many women activists want to assert their independence from the state, as noted above, and use more unifying frames that relate to the average Muslim woman's daily needs. Activists refer to Islamic teachings and scriptures to connect with women who feel attached to their religious identity. Given that many Muslim women feel that the state does not support them or consider their needs (as evidenced by their exclusively brokered relationships with male leaders), they derive their rights from religious authority, instead of state authority. The state might believe that its religious corporatism wins the respect of faith communities, but a closer examination of Muslim women's political activism suggests otherwise.

IV. RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN STATE

In contrast to the contentious relationship that many British Muslim women activists disclose they have with their state, many American Muslim women activists credit the American state's narrative of religious freedom with enabling their activism. This section will briefly describe the historic role of religion in the US that has traditionally enabled religious activism within its civic population. I will then draw on empirical research to explain how the American Constitutional commitment to religious freedom has empowered Muslim women activists to construct an American Islam as they see fit. Unlike Britain, where state authorities try to regulate religion because it fears it will challenge loyalties to British state, the US does not fear religious challenges and tolerates organizing in multiple communities of faith, as long as they abide by Constitutional rights. The American state does not take the religious

corporatist approach and does not broker exclusive relationships with male interlocutors, which means that Muslim women activists are free to put forth their own representations and interpretations of the Muslim identity. Through a close examination of the recent global controversies involving different states' relationships with religion (specifically Islam), I suggest that the national and local levels of American government have thus far demonstrated a strong attachment to religious freedom that will not be questioned by claims of offense. Though the episodes have also revealed public attitudes that ask Muslims to choose between their nationality and faith, American state powers have, as of yet, stayed consistent in their support for Muslim activism.

A. Religion in America

The state's relationship with religion in America plays an important historical role in social movement activism, as a wide array of reformers from the nation's founders up until President Barack Obama have invoked religious language and principles to make political arguments for social justice. The first colonists were Puritans who were so disillusioned with the corrupt Anglican Church in England that they fled to the New World to establish a country where they would be free to create their own 'pure' Christian community. The religious freedom that Puritans expected in the new country, however, did not necessarily extend to other religious groups. Baptists in late 1700s' Virginia, for example, were prohibited from practicing their religion and petitioned for the government to stay out of their community religious affairs. Thomas Jefferson, who had just written the Declaration of Independence, adopted their cause as an example of religious liberty and proposed legislation that would expand religious liberty to all groups (Peterson and Vaughan 1988).

Scholars argue that a significant result of the Great Awakening—a vast religious revival that swept across America in the middle of the eighteenth century—was the debate that surged in the period leading up to the country’s first Constitution over the merits of a free religious marketplace (Lambert 2003). Jefferson, for instance, argued that competition among religious interpretations was a healthy exercise of the right to religious liberty. In 1776, he argued: “From the dissensions among Sects themselves arise necessarily a right of choosing and necessity of deliberating to which we will conform. But if we choose for ourselves, we must allow others to choose also, and so reciprocally, this establishes religious liberty” (Jefferson 1776; Papers 1:545). In defending the Baptist case for religious liberty, he authored the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, arguing that the state must refrain from regulating religious interpretations: “To suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency is a dangerous fallacy which at once destroys all religious liberty, because he being of course judge of that tendency will make his opinions the rule of judgment and approve or condemn the sentiments of others only as they shall square with or differ from his own” (Jefferson 1779; Papers 2: 546).

Jefferson continued to lobby at the national level for the importance of religious liberty and the competitive interpretations he believed it engendered. When the first draft of the Constitution in 1788 refrained from recognizing a state church, yet still failed to explicitly guarantee religious freedom, Jefferson advocated for legislation that would better secure individual rights—most importantly, the freedom *of* and *from* religion. Eventually, in 1789, the first Bill of Rights was drafted and the first amendment to the Constitution in 1791 included the religious establishment clause. I argue that these protections for the individual interpretation of religion are part of the cultural repertoire or toolkit that American Muslim women activists use to

enable their representative and reinterpetive activism.

Religious minorities have continued to invoke the country's religious founding in their own struggles for religious liberty throughout American history. For instance, in the nineteenth century, Catholics in New York City believed that the city's public schools were imposing Protestant teachings on their children. In their defense, Archbishop John Hughes referred to the Constitution and argued that America was founded on religious liberty that either required schools to stop forcing Protestantism on non-Protestant children or the state to fund the establishment of non-Protestant dominated schools (McGreevy 2004). Though Hughes lost his initial battle with the city government, his Constitutional appeals set the stage for what became the Catholic movement for political representation and power in New York City; moreover, in 1842, the New York Senate passed the Maclay Bill that banned religious instruction in public schools (Anthrop 1990).

Controversial cases involving the role of religion in classrooms have continued to become flashpoints of the government's stance on religious freedom. Throughout these different controversies, one principle has remained consistent in the American narrative—more often than not, the right to religious freedom is considered paramount and the state endeavors to protect the freedom of faith. In the 1960s, the Supreme Court ruled on the appropriate status of religion in American public schools; according to the court, the religious-liberty clauses of the First Amendment to the Constitution provide a civic framework for how religion should be handled in the classroom: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise of...” (U.S. CONST, amend. 1). Religious belief, it claimed, shall not be promoted nor inhibited in public education. In *Abington v. Schemp* (1963), the Supreme Court further stated that there was a difference between ‘teaching about religion’ and ‘teaching religion’ and that religion could indeed be incorporated into

curriculum if it was the former, but not the latter. The Court argued:

[I]t might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.¹³²

America's national narrative as a religious country was also invoked by racial minorities during the Civil Rights Movement to argue for an end to racial discrimination. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. repeatedly referred to the nation's religious roots in his demands for justice, called the movement's followers 'God's children' and continuously reiterated the idea that both Christianity and the Constitution of the United States believed in the individual rights to equality and justice for which the movement struggled. In 1955 after Rosa Parks was arrested after refusing to surrender her seat on a bus to a white person and effectively launched a boycott, King underlined the idea that racial discrimination violated the nation's religious and Constitutional principles: "We are not wrong in what we are doing...If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong."¹³³ My research suggests that new immigrant activists similarly highlight their

¹³² *Abington Township School District v. Schempp*, (1963). 374 U.S. 203.

¹³³ See the text of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's Speech at the Holt Street Baptist Church at the Start of the Montgomery Bus Boycott (Dec. 5, 1955):

religious identity in America in order to tap into a national narrative conducive to religious practice.

The young American Muslim women activists I interviewed explained how growing up in a country that values religiosity enabled their activism in constructing a distinctly egalitarian *American Muslim* identity. Some respondents emphasized the hyphenated nature of the identity; one 34 year old foreign aid worker, born to Palestinian parents, explains her impression that America appreciates multiple identities:

America is a land of immigrants, unlike a lot of European countries, so growing up, there was this sense that there's African-Americans, there's Native Americans—and they all have horrible histories—but there was also a certain pride in their Americanness and their experience. So I was always excited to say I was an Arab-American or that I'm an American Muslim because that hyphen was almost a [mark] of pride... we're like the new kids on the block, so I was always eager to present [in class] about being Muslim.

The pride that this young woman feels due to her 'hyphenated' identity indicates that she interprets her religious identity as a mark of difference that was celebrated in the classroom when she was a child, instead of difference that alienated her from her peers. A 29 year old media activist, born to Pakistani parents, also believes that hyphenated identities were a primarily positive experience:

http://www.blackvoices.com/black_news/canvas_directory_headlines_features/feature_article?id=20060111182609990001.

I think America is more of a melting pot, where you're melting [into one society], but you can still stay distinct—you bring your own color to it, you know?... So my sense is that, in America, you have these hyphenated identities and you can be totally Muslim and you can be totally American.

This young activist does not see the two identities in conflict and finds the hyphenated identity to mark the different (positive) contributions that people from various ethnicities or religious backgrounds offer to the larger melting pot of American identity.

Respondents frequently invoke the Constitutional right to religious freedom. One 27 year old student leader, born to Arab Muslim parents, explains how these concepts are taught as part of American culture and impact how free second generation Muslim students feel to experiment with their religious identity:

American culture is about individual freedom, you do what you want... I think that allows them to experiment with being religious, to put on the headscarf, [or] take it off... I know a lot of people who have gone through phases...I think it's American culture and what America's about that allows them to express themselves, and not feel pressure to hold back and it gives them free reign to be different things, like be religious... it's America itself that allows for that sort of thing to happen.

A 33 year old activist who works on domestic violence issues concurs about the

importance of individualism, religious freedom and freedom of expression; she strongly feels that these principles are integral components of the American experience and help young Muslims to acknowledge their American *and* Muslim identities, for fear of leaving something important out of their experience:

We're constantly pounded with this rhetoric of individualism and how it's important to be unique, we hear this all the time--I don't care if it's in cartoons, or going to school, there's this constant chant of being an individual...and we talk about religious freedom and freedom of expression and I think all of those come together, where a person can see that, 'yes, it might not be popular, but if I'm ignoring my Muslim identity, I'm losing a sense of my self' and the self is very important. And it's very emphasized-- I don't care what your niche in society is, that is the American cultural ideal--to be the individual and express oneself. You can't turn that off.

Respondents suggest that America's acceptance of religion empowers them to construct a distinctly American Muslim identity. A 25 year old student leader, born to Pakistani parents, contended that the French *hijab* ban in 2004 could never happen in the US because of the different level of respect that religion receives in this country:

I can't ever imagine that ban happening in the US because the concept of accepting religious freedom, of equality, of respect of faith--even among my Christian friends, even if they don't believe in my faith, they

respect that I'm a faithful person--and I feel like that respect... and the way you view religion here is different.

It should be noted that all American Muslims do not believe that America's religiosity necessarily translates into acceptance of their community. For instance, particularly after the 2001 terror attacks, many Muslims felt that their community's civil liberties were unfairly restricted due to security concerns. A study conducted of American Muslim college youth, five years after the attacks, describes how certain laws enacted in the aftermath of the attacks suggested that being Muslim and American were not compatible identities; for instance, students pointed to the PATRIOT Act, airport safety and security laws, visa regulations, and foreign policy decisions to go to war with two Muslim countries as state actions that increasingly challenged the American component of their identity. Instead of allowing this sense of isolation to decidedly cancel half of their identity, the students in the study argue that it is not only incumbent upon the government to reach out to the American Muslim community more, but it is also important for the media to stop portraying Muslims in negative, stereotypical images of violent men and submissive women. Students also argue that it is important for Muslims themselves to break down stereotypes of what it means to be American and permeate mainstream society (Muedini 2009).

Some activists argued that the terrorist attacks shone a spotlight on the American Muslim community and they perceived the timing as a good opportunity to clarify the role of Muslims in American society. While some activists concurred with the students in the study cited above that the changes in legislation threatened their American civil liberties and forced them to defend Islam, other activists thought it opened up an opportunity for many young American Muslims to ask important

questions of their own community and take part in constructing what they wanted to be the American Muslim Identity. A 27 year old student activist explained:

I think [Muslim] institutions and organizations changed for the better after 9/11 because I think Muslims felt we were under the spotlight and it made more critics willing to challenge the status quo and people who were not happy with how things were being done, [they] felt more open to do something about it. Because all of a sudden there are open houses, or journalists coming into mosques... plus it kind of gave ammo to people in the community who wanted to reform things and wanted to shake things up... A lot of people started standing up, plus people who were apathetic, it gave them more of a reason...and they felt like this isn't who our community is, this is not what Islam represents. And they might have always known that, but they felt like they needed to do something about it because now, after 9/11, we had all this media attention on the Muslim community. And how the Muslim community runs itself actually represents Islam. And if we don't fix our own house, as the Muslim community, it's also going to misrepresent Islam.

Part of the 'status quo' that this activist refers to is the patriarchal misinterpretation of Islam that not only pervades media representations of Islam, but first generation Muslims' interpretations of gender-justice issues as well. The terrorist attack, in

essence, drew public attention to the American Muslim community and many activists felt that it was the catalyst to not only reclaim Islam's position on women's rights, but also stress the idea that their American and Muslim identities are compatible with one another. The American Muslim Identity, then, becomes reinforced as an identity that critically engages with ideas and challenges patriarchal cultural traditions that are perpetuated in the name of faith.

However, my research suggests that this sort of 'reimagining' of Islam can only occur amidst a set of institutional arrangements that acknowledges the importance of religious freedom. This system would describe a relationship between the state and religious communities where free market religious interpretation is encouraged in the latter and the state refrains from appointing certain religious representatives to determine the group's needs. In contrast, when a state takes the approach of religious corporatism, my research shows that it appoints first generation male leaders, who end up resisting women's internal activism and effectively stifling their frames.

Recent controversies have tested different states' commitment to religious freedom and liberalism. The French have definitively held liberal rights above group claims, although they still prevent Muslim women who *choose* to veil from their liberal right to do so. The verdict is out on other European states, though there is reason to believe that Germany and the Netherlands are leaning towards the French model as well. In Britain, the state has decided that group claims can be solved through the democratic principle of *representation*—as long as they appoint Muslim representatives, they will be able to negotiate for the community.

In the US, however, there have been very recent episodes that test its commitment to religious freedom and liberalism and, thus far, the state has succeeded in upholding its commitment to both. Conflicts often arise when people claim that

their religious freedom has been violated because some actor has ‘offended’ them, or when people claim their liberty has been violated by others’ religious practice. In the following sections, however, I argue that upholding religious freedom and the freedom to offend are two sides of the same coin. The same freedom that allows individuals to offend others of a particular religious persuasion also underlines the importance of protecting the religious freedom of the offended. A coherent government policy that remains committed to the country’s liberal premise would allow these offenses to occur, yet allow the state to interfere only if the action against the religious group is deemed ‘harmful’—a measure beyond offense. I compare the conduct in the ‘Ground Zero mosque’ controversy to the conduct in the ‘Danish cartoons’ controversy in 2006 to demonstrate that the state cannot make consistent judgments on ‘offense’ that would please all actors, so the more coherent policy would be consistent non-intervention.

B. The ‘Ground Zero Mosque’ Debate Tests Religious Freedom in America

In 2010, a group called the Cordoba Initiative approached the local New York City government about building an Islamic community center on private property in lower Manhattan. The new space would house various facilities, including libraries, restaurants, a culinary school, childcare services, and a 500-seat auditorium.¹³⁴ The building’s proposal also included a mosque prayer space that its planners described as “accessible to all members and visitors of our New York community.”¹³⁵ The center’s proposed location, two blocks north of the World Trade Center attacks, drew considerable opposition from conservative Americans who continue to argue that the location of an Islamic place of worship so close to ‘hallowed ground’ is a ‘slap in the

¹³⁴ See the proposal for The Community Center at Park51, as the Islamic community center is named: <http://www.park51.org/facilities.htm>.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

face' for the families of victims who died on September 11, 2001.¹³⁶ More recently, even a majority of local New Yorkers claim that they are not against building the mosque in principle, but still believe the specific location is 'insensitive' and should be moved.¹³⁷ The controversy over allowing the Muslim community to build this community center (and its incorporated prayer space) has compelled its planners, American Muslims and American state powers to defend the American Muslim community's right to religious freedom against such claims of 'offense.'

At a White House dinner commemorating the end of the month-long Muslim holiday of Ramadan in August, President Barack Obama delivered a speech on religious tolerance, addressing the New York City controversy and contending that the claims of offense could not trump Muslims' religious freedom. In unequivocal terms, Obama argued that the debate over the mosque in New York could never ask the government to interfere with the right to religious freedom:

As a citizen and as president, I believe that Muslims have the right to practice their religion as everyone else in this country. And that includes the right to build a place of worship on private property in lower Manhattan, in accordance with local laws and ordinances. This is America and our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakeable. The principle that people of all faiths are welcome in this country and

¹³⁶ See media coverage of the opposition to the community center: <http://www.newsweek.com/blogs/the-gaggle/2010/05/10/right-wing-mosque-at-ground-zero-is-a-quot-slap-in-the-face-quot.html>.

¹³⁷ See coverage of *The New York Times* poll called "New Yorkers want Islamic Center Moved, Poll Finds" *The New York Times*, September 2, 2010: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/03/nyregion/03poll.html?pagewanted=1&partner=rss&emc=rss>.

that they will not be treated differently by their government is essential to who we are. The writ of the founders must endure.”¹³⁸

Obama emphasized the Constitutional right to religious freedom and deferred jurisdiction to the local New York City government—the only legal restrictions to building the center would be local laws and ordinances. Some political commentators saw Obama’s decision to insert himself in the debate as an affirmation of American freedoms, with one commentator arguing that “As a Constitutional scholar, [Obama] felt it was important to make the point that the government should never have the authority to make such a discriminatory decision, because those are the very freedoms we’re fighting to protect against enemies who attack us.”¹³⁹

The next day, when President Obama responded to a reporter shouting a question to him about the mosque’s location, he said he would not comment on the ‘wisdom’ of the mosque’s location. These remarks disappointed many of the people who appreciated Obama’s first day’s comments, and they claimed that he was backtracking, ‘flip-flop’ing and trying to please his critics.¹⁴⁰ Instead, I argue that Obama was trying to underline his position of government neutrality, by refraining from *either* endorsing *or* objecting to the mosque’s location, because his first day’s remarks had caused local politicians to undermine this impartiality. Local leaders were scrambling to take a position on the mosque to curry the favor of their

¹³⁸ At the White House Iftar dinner for Ramadan, President Obama publicly declared his support for the proposal to build a mosque in lower Manhattan, a controversial proposal popularly referred to as the ‘Ground Zero Mosque.’

¹³⁹ See The Huffington Post coverage: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-weigant/obama-reframes-mosque-deb_b_684160.html.

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129236595>

constituencies, who might use their representatives' opposition or support of the mosque as a litmus test for their votes in an election year.¹⁴¹

While it categorically recuses itself from public protests' demands that the government should *prevent* the community center from being built, the executive branch is very clear that all opinions must be allowed—including, importantly, the opposition protests. Both sides must remain *free* to try to convince the other as long as they abide by legal means (e.g. violence, obstruction to their freedoms, etc.). As one political commentator puts it, it might be protest and public opinion that convinced nuns not to maintain a church next to a Nazi death camp or Walt Disney to back down from building an amusement park next to a Civil War battlefield.¹⁴² As long as the opposition does not violate the rights of those in support of the mosque, they are free to oppose the center in all their capacity. If, on one hand, they convince those supporting the mosque that it might be better to move it, then it is considered a matter of persuasive public opinion, and not coercion, intimidation or oppression. If, on the other hand, the supporters of the mosque convince the opposition that they should build it and the protests dissolve, then this would also indicate they persuaded public opinion.

The local government to which Obama deferred legal jurisdiction agreed with his endorsement of religious freedom. The local planning board approved the project and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg gave a public address expressing unambiguous support for the Muslim community's freedom to build and enjoy the center. Bloomberg delivered a speech on Governors Island in New York in August 2010, in which he argues that the state has no role in this matter: "Whatever you may think of the proposed mosque and community center, lost in the heat of the debate has

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² See Chris Weigant: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-weigant/obama-reframes-mosque-deb_b_684160.html

been a basic question: Should government attempt to deny private citizens the right to build a house of worship on private property based on their particular religion. That may happen in other countries, but we should never allow it to happen here.”¹⁴³ He stressed that if the government tried to deny worshippers the right to build their center on private property, the “courts would almost certain strike it down as a violation of the U.S. Constitution.”¹⁴⁴

Bloomberg invokes the nation’s founding in order to express the significance of the right to religious freedom: “This nation was founded on the principle that the government must never choose between religions or favor one over another... for that reason, I believe that this is an [*sic*] important test of the separation of church and state as we may see in our lifetimes... and it is critically important that we get it right.”¹⁴⁵ The Mayor draws on New York’s own history with challenges to religious freedom, suggesting that perhaps the first formal petition for religious freedom in the American colonies was waged by a group of non-Quakers in Queens in 1657 who “signed the Flushing Remonstrance, a petition in defense of the right of Quakers and others to freely practice their religion.”¹⁴⁶ Bloomberg argues that religious freedom not only has an important part in the country’s national narrative, but also in New York in particular; he proudly declares that New York was where the “earliest settlers first set foot in New Amsterdam and where the seeds of religious tolerance were first planted.”¹⁴⁷ Bloomberg suggests that to deny Muslims this center would be “untrue to the best part of ourselves and who we are as New Yorkers and Americans.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ cite Bloomberg speech transcript.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Finally, Bloomberg also notes to be a New Yorker in today's age, one must be sensitive to the values that were attacked in 2001: "The attack was an act of war, and our first responders defended not only our city, but our country and our constitution. We do not honor their lives by denying the very Constitutional rights they died protecting. We honor their lives by defending those rights and the freedoms that the terrorists attacked." In referencing 9/11, Bloomberg tries to co-opt what the attacks should represent—instead of fear mongering and religious profiling, he believes the attacks should make the city more committed to defending religious freedom.

Though he unequivocally believes that the government cannot deny private citizens the right to build a house of worship, it should be noted that Bloomberg does address the matter of sensitivity: "Of course it is fair to ask the organizers of the mosque to show some special sensitivity to the situation, and in fact their plan envisions reaching beyond their walls and building an interfaith community."¹⁴⁹ Bloomberg does not specify whether showing sensitivity would include relocating the mosque. He simply maintains that Muslims and those who deserve sensitivity because of 9/11 are not exclusive groups: "Muslims were among those murdered on 9/11, and that our Muslim neighbors grieved with us as New Yorkers and as Americans." Neither Bloomberg nor Obama suggest that the protesters should desist, however, in keeping with the position of government neutrality; the protests would be allowed until they disturbed public order by breaking laws.

This attention to sensitivity calls to mind the debates over abolishing blasphemy law in Britain, because both episodes question whether people can be protected from 'offense.' While the British state first adopted its blasphemy law because it feared religious challenges to state authority, the protection from offense was indeed eventually abolished in 2008, because, as I demonstrated above, the state

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

was no longer interested in elevating religious leadership; the state instead became interested in preserving order through law and order legislation. In the US, there seems to have been less interest in protecting people from offense (religious or otherwise), and there is, instead, a long historical emphasis on law and order legislation that safeguards individual rights. In other words, even if state powers refer to ‘sensitivity’ that would mitigate potential offense, there is no actual right to protection from said offense.

Though the *imam* in charge of the center, *Imam* Feisal Abdul Rauf, draws most of the media coverage, his wife Daisy Khan is a prominent American Muslim women’s right activist who, like the other Muslim women I interviewed, tries to construct a distinctly egalitarian American Muslim identity. Together the two Muslim leaders founded the Cordoba Initiative, as well as the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA), a New York-based non-profit organization that promotes an “authentic expression of Islam based on cultural and religious harmony through interfaith collaboration, youth and women’s empowerment, and arts and cultural exchange.”¹⁵⁰ One of the programs for women’s empowerment is called the *Women’s Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity*, which claims to “build a cohesive, global movement of Muslim women that will reclaim women’s rights in Islam, enabling them to make dignified choices and fully participate in creating just and flourishing societies.”¹⁵¹ These organizations may have ambitious missions, but they are *local* groups who make claims about authentic expressions of Islam. These groups are able to be heard on the national level because there are no institutional arrangements in place in the US that prevent them from voicing their construction of the American Muslim identity. This chapter has sought to demonstrate that, in contrast, Britain’s

¹⁵⁰ See ASMA’s website and mission statement: <http://www.asmasociety.org/about/index.html>.

¹⁵¹

institutional arrangement of religious corporatism has stifled the religious activism of young British Muslim women.

American executive leaders have taken the approach of non-intervention, which means that public sentiment that claims to be ‘offended’ by a mosque near the ‘hallow’ ground cannot prevent the mosque from being built. The opponents are free to feel the offense and even protest against the mosque, within legal means. But the state will not protect a right to be protected from offense, and it will not restrict the principle of religious freedom. The next section looks at the Danish Cartoon Affair and how it triggered a very thoughtful debate on whether ‘*the freedom of expression includes the license to offend.*’

C. The Danish Cartoon Affair’s Debate

In October 2006, the Rosencrantz Foundation in the US hosted a debate where it asked notable scholars, political commentators, journalists and activists to discuss the resolution whether ‘*freedom must include the license to offend.*’ The impetus for the debate was the global unrest caused earlier that year by the publication of a set of twelve cartoons that a Danish newspaper, *Jylands-Posten*, purposely commissioned to pictorialize the Prophet Muhammad. The cartoons set off violent riots at Danish embassies across the Muslim and European world, as Muslims claimed the cartoons ‘offended’ them on religious grounds.

The paper’s cultural editor, Flemming Rose, publicly defended the cartoons’ publication as a deliberate protest against a recent spate of self-censorship cases where journalists and artists were increasingly fearful of confronting issues about Islam. Rose acknowledges that the cartoons offended some people and apologizes for their hurt feelings. However, he says, he “cannot apologize for [the] right to publish material, even offensive material. You cannot edit a newspaper if you are paralyzed by

worries about every possible insult.”¹⁵² Flemming does not argue for absolute and unrestricted freedom of expressions—he even says he agrees that “the freedom to publish things doesn’t mean you publish everything”—but he does not believe this right can be restricted to prevent religious offense. He argues: “If a believer demands that I, as a nonbeliever, observe his taboos in the public domain, he is not asking for my respect, but for my submission. And that is incompatible with a secular democracy.” The cartoons are known to have caused little controversy until a group of *imams* disseminated a packet of the cartoons to Muslim world, fueling anger and instigating violent protests against Danish embassies across the Muslim world and Europe. Protests demanded that the Danish government ban the newspaper and apologize to Muslims for allowing what they argued was grave offense.¹⁵³

The Rosencrantz debate asked three people to debate each side of the resolution: *freedom of expression should include the license to offend*. One of the proponents arguing in favor of the resolution was Philip Gourevitch, a writer for *The New Yorker*. Gourevitch argues that the authority to define offense is too powerful to cede to any authority. He argues that those who want to restrict the license to offend incorrectly believe they know what would be limited and what would be allowed. He says:

They think all speech is a license ...because most speech should be restricted before it is licensed. Then we

¹⁵² See Rose, Flemming. “Why I Published Those Cartoons” *The Washington Post*, February 19, 2006.

¹⁵³ The author is aware that the political theorist Saba Mahmood’s work currently looks at the particular ‘nature’ of the offense. She argues that depicting the Prophet goes beyond insult and actually ‘injurs’ Muslims. But for the purposes of this dissertation, and because the definition of harm is debatable, I operate under the assumption that they were claims of offense, not harm.

decide, okay, we'll let this out, we'll let that out, we'll let this out, we'll let that out. I think that that's a very, very, very dangerous precipice on which they want to perch us. ...What is to say that they will stay in charge of that speech? What is to say that we will not fall into the hands of somebody we don't trust? What is to say that the message that one day seems somewhat sane, the next day becomes to kill, and that the people who say let us not kill are silenced in the name of reasonable speech and in the name of civilization to moderate that.

One of his teammates, the literary critic and public intellectual Christopher Hitchens, agrees that the responsibility of deciding what constitutes offense inevitably leads to manipulating powers that restrict the opinions with which they do not agree. He engages with the example that we are not allowed to shout fire in a crowded theatre, the famous restriction that people invoke when arguing that freedom of expression is not limitless. Hitchens traces this example back to Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes who used the example to argue that a group of Yiddish radicals could not hand out leaflets opposing President Wilson's war in 1919. Hitchens argues that limiting freedom of speech gives incredible power to authorities to censor opinions with which they disagree. He argues that this power should not be handed to just anybody:

Who will you appoint? Who will be the one who says, I know exactly where the limits should be, I know how far you can go and I know when you've gone too far,

and I'll decide that... Those of you who know *Areopagitica* and Paine's commentary on it will know that it recommends free speech in this way—not for you, but for the people you are listening to and the people whose comments you hope to hear in return, for your own education, for your own enlightenment and for your own elucidation. As Mr. Paine says, commenting on Milton, one of the vices of those who would repress the opinions of others is they make themselves prisoners of their own opinions, because they deny themselves the rights and the means of changing them...The free interplay of ideas is not something that those of us who wish to speak or unload our opinions insist upon for that sake, it's because we want to hear what is said in response, however unwelcome it may be to us. Thus the defense of any one opinion or form of expression is a defense of all of them.

In the context of the Danish cartoons controversy that triggered this debate, Gourevitch and Hitchens argue that the logic that censors offensive cartoons today could silence important, necessary dissent tomorrow.

Interestingly, the same Daisy Khan associated with the Park51 controversy in chapter five was on the team in favor of restricting the license to offend. She argues that freedom of expression must be accompanied by social responsibility, and, essentially, that if the speech does not meet requirements of responsibility or a desire to “elevate the public discourse” it is useless and inflammatory:

So when you publish cartoons which of course are a form of entertainment ...as a medium for conveying a particular message, or a speech is given by a person of immense power like the Pope, which further drives people apart and cements stereotypes, you're using public discourse to malign the way an already marginalized community is perceived. This, my friends, is not in accordance with our foundational values of free speech. This is un-American. The point is not whether such things can or cannot be published. But of course, they *are* published. Who's preventing them? The issue is whether there's any wisdom in showing the prophet of Islam with a bomb in his turban no less. This is the sort of thing that furthers that familiar, yet dangerous and unsound argument, some Muslim men are terrorists, therefore, all or even most Muslim men are terrorists. Now this last statement is certainly something we can say, something that is enshrined in free speech. But is it true? Is it responsible? Does it elevate the public discourse? Or is it simply racist, xenophobic drivel, that isn't half as clever as it purports to be?

In the context of the Danish cartoons affair, Khan argues that publishing the cartoons does not inflict some nebulous, grave harm on Muslims by depicting their Prophet (in fact, she argues that "this isn't about drawing the prophet, for which there are many

historical precedents in traditional Muslim art”), in spite of many arguments by fellow Muslims to that effect. Instead, she argues that the cartoons should not have been published because they insulted and marginalized a group that was already suffering from minority status—Khan sees the freedom to offend as the majority’s method of tyranny.

In the end, the team in favor of the license to offend overwhelmingly defeated their opponents—audience members even voted, 201 in favor of the proposition, 39 against, and 1 undecided. The audience seems to have been convinced that even if social responsibility is important, the power to decide what’s ‘irresponsible’ is too dangerous to surrender. The government must take a position of non-intervention on claims of offense—neither endorse nor object to freedom of expression, as long as it stays within legal means. Interestingly, Khan would likely agree with proponents today, because the government’s non-intervention policy has protected the right of the Cordoba Initiative to build Park51. Even though the center’s opponents claim offense, the government has not intervened to prevent the center from being built.

I would expand upon the argument proposed by the team in favor of the license to offend by adding that religious freedom and the freedom to offend are two sides of the same coin. Arguments that claim free speech is only considered valuable if it is ‘wise’ and ‘socially responsible’ open the door to (often religious) majorities who claim that minority religions are not valuable to society, and thus do not deserve religious liberty. It is the freedom to offend that often opens space for dissenting voices to speak up within groups, and, specifically relevant to my research, allows Muslim women to individually interpret Islam’s position on gender-justice and push for religious reform—even if these interpretations are initially not appreciated in either the public or private sphere.

V. CONCLUSION

Even as I write, America is caught up in a heated debate about an obscure pastor in Florida who threatened to burn copies of the Qur'an on the 9th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Only after a personal appeal from Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, who argued the burning would unnecessarily put American troops at risk of retaliation in the Muslim world, the pastor has 'postponed' the burning. Protests have still begun in some countries, with people angry that the US state failed to actually ban the burning.¹⁵⁴ President Obama has, in fact, stepped in and made public remarks asking the pastor to think carefully about the negative repercussions his actions could cause; but just as he cannot stop the protests against Park51, the President cannot step in to stop the Qur'an burning without sacrificing America's Constitutional commitment to individual rights and freedom. The freedom to burn the Qur'an and the freedom to build Park51 are considered part and parcel of the same fundamental rights to freedom. After the pastor decided to postpone the burning, Obama made public remarks asking for calm over the episode. He again appealed to principles of religious freedom and tolerance and emphasized that what set America apart, even during his predecessor's regime, was that America chose to stand together against 'murderers' and 'terrorists' who committed the attacks, and not against American Muslims who also mourned the country's loss.¹⁵⁵

Some say that Obama's remarks elevated the pastor who was otherwise little-known, and exaggerated the controversy. Obama responded by arguing the dangers of

¹⁵⁴ See media coverage of protests: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11258739>.

¹⁵⁵ See media coverage of Obama's remarks: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-11265335>.

allowing images to spread in the age of internet and cause violence across the world.¹⁵⁶ In an address to the nation, he stressed that it was important that Americans “don’t start turning on each other” and that America is “one nation under God... and you may call that God by many names, but we are one nation.” It is difficult to say whether ignoring the incident would have resulted in less controversy, but it is clear that Obama invokes the religious language that many social reformers called upon throughout American history to highlight America’s providential narrative as a nation that uniquely guarantees individual rights and religious liberty.

In point of fact, in February 2009—one of the first months of this new administration—a Dutch member of Parliament named Geertz Wilders was invited by a Republican senator to screen a film he had made called *Fitna* in the US Congress.¹⁵⁷ *Fitna* was accused of being anti-Muslim propaganda by Muslim leaders in Europe and Wilders was, just two weeks earlier, banned from entry into the UK when a conservative MP invited him to screen the film in Parliament. The incident flared up during my field research period in Britain, with Muslim mainstream organizations claiming his film offended Muslims and the British state appealing to the Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006 to ban Wilders from entry (see chapter five). The state argued that Wilders’ visit was likely to incite hatred and violence and would disturb public order.¹⁵⁸ The state’s position was eventually overruled by a court’s demands for more evidence of potential public harm, and Wilders was allowed to enter the UK ten

¹⁵⁶ See media coverage of Obama’s response: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/aee0e102-bd02-11df-954b-00144feab49a.html>

¹⁵⁷ See the (little) media coverage of Wilder’s visit to Washington: <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/26/mr-wilders-goes-to-washington/>.

¹⁵⁸ See media coverage of Wilder’s barred entry: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7886237.stm; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7885918.stm>.

months later.¹⁵⁹ In contrast to the media blitz that covered the Wilders' affair in Britain, the issue received no attention in the American media. By the same logic above, perhaps if the administration had elevated the incident by making public remarks or trying to ban his entry like its British counterpart, there might have been more controversy. But, in reality, it came and went without much notice and many Americans are unlikely even today to know it happened. The significance of this direct comparison, however, points to the American state's position that allows competition in the marketplace of ideas (as opposed to British regulation), even if it may result in offense.

These recent controversies demonstrate that truly valuing religious freedom necessitates upholding individual rights even when they might *offend* others, not just when they are convenient and uncontroversial. In the case of the cartoons, this principle means that the Danish paper had its right to publish editorial cartoons and the government, rightly, did not interfere. And in the case of Park51, it is exactly this non-interventionist position and the idea that individuals do not have the right to be protected from offense that allows the center to move forward with its plans. Its opponents also claim offense—that building a mosque so close to a national tragedy caused by Muslim extremists is a 'slap in the face' to the survivors and the loved ones of victims and first responders who died in 9/11 attacks. Whether or not people believe the location is 'insensitive' or in 'bad taste' is deemed a perfectly legitimate opinion that they may express through their own individual rights to freedom of expression; but this opinion cannot become a rights claim that tries to restrict the freedom of Muslims who want to build the center on private property.

¹⁵⁹ See media coverage of the overruling:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/oct/13/geert-wilders-wins-appeal-ban-uk>.

The scope of my research reaches out to the field of religion and politics and makes claims that the relationship between a state and its religious communities influences religious activism within its society. If a state promotes a sense of free market religious interpretation by invoking a national narrative focused on individual rights and religious freedom, my research suggests that religious activists will be enabled to pursue religious reform. If a state tries to control the religious community by brokering relationships with appointed representatives who stifle dissenting voices, the community's less powerful members are likely to be marginalized in defining the group's needs. Just as religious minorities have used individual rights to appeal to protection from religious discrimination and racial minorities have used individual rights to appeal to protection from racial discrimination, some of my American Muslim respondents appeal to a cultural repertoire of individual rights to argue against gender discrimination in their religious community—discrimination in the public sphere by mainstream media representation *and* discrimination in the private sphere by male leaders' misinterpretations of Islam's position on gender-justice.

Laurence (2010) argues that a state adopts the religious corporatist approach because it wants to assert authority over religious communities. My research, however, demonstrates that the state, in fact, delegitimizes itself among Muslim women leaders, by appointing male leaders to the Muslim councils and advisory groups who do not represent women's interests in the community. Even when the British state launched the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group, the group's members were hand-picked by the state, leading to criticism from fellow Muslim women leaders that the group would not represent grassroots interests. The state's intervention obstructs women's gender-justice activism; community members think the leaders are inextricably linked with the government and male leaders feel threatened that their authority is in danger and resist women's campaigns. Against this

backdrop, British activists are forced to strategically limit themselves to affirmative frames so they can make gender-justice claims that are more familiar and less threatening to underlying power structures.

The US, alternatively, has avoided appointing representatives or starting formal advisory groups. American Muslims are decentralized and their activism is enabled by the Constitutional narrative of religious freedom and individual rights. They make gender-justice claims as religious activists in the context of a society in which the government is not deeply suspicious of faith communities—if anything, it has, at points, taken special interest in advancing religious groups’ interests. In the next chapter, I offer some concluding remarks about the implications of a state’s position on religious freedom and liberal rights on its religious communities—namely, how modernity might, in fact, *enable* a form of heightened religiosity that challenges misogynistic religious interpretations and makes gender-justice claims from *within* the religious framework.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The term ‘Muslim feminism’ is considered by many to be an oxymoron. Despite the fact that mainstream feminism in both the UK and US has been firmly rooted in the secular tradition and is deeply suspicious of religiosity, my research demonstrates that religious women challenge the assumption that feminist arguments must be made from a secular perspective. Such evidence requires a restructuring of feminist theory that includes, instead of marginalizes, feminists of faith.

This conclusion will first explain why feminist theory must seriously reconsider its exclusion of religious women. Though feminists have emerged in all five major world faiths, religion is still seen as incompatible with modernization and secular traditions of women’s rights. Islam, in particular, is popularly understood as a fundamentally misogynist religion. I argue that, whereas modernity and religion are traditionally thought of as incompatible systems, modernity might in fact *enable* the religious activism I study. In order to demonstrate this compatible relationship, I will recapitulate my major findings on Muslim women’s activism in both countries. Specifically, my research makes an important contribution to the restructuring of feminist theory and intersectionality—Muslim women who choose to make feminist claims from within the Islamic faith, instead of *in spite* of their religion, demonstrate the need for intersectionality theory to reconsider the interaction between gender and religious identities. Finally, I conclude with some comments about how my research design and findings might hold some helpful lessons about comparative political studies in general.

I. RESTRUCTURING FEMINIST THEORY

While Susan Moller Okin takes a more assertive stance against religion's impact on women's lives, mainstream feminist theory's disdain for women who make claims for equality from within their faith tradition is, ironically, more noticeable through its inattention to religious women. Moreover, even when feminist theorists discuss intersectionality, a concept that primarily addresses the interaction between multiple systems of oppression, analysis focuses on systems of race, class, ethnicity, and—more recently—sexual orientation, but rarely religion. Religion is portrayed as institutionalized male privilege that sanctions itself with divine authority and mainstream feminists root themselves in a secular tradition that discounts claims from women who insist on subscribing to such a system of belief.

A. Feminism and Major World Religions

In reality, however, we know that feminist claims have emerged in all of the world's five major world religions—Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and, as my research demonstrates, Islam. Just as my findings on Muslim feminism argue that religious women challenge forms of institutional power by pursuing ordination as religious leaders, reinterpret textual sources through an egalitarian lens, and reclaim images of what are otherwise thought of as oppressive dress codes, the other world religions include similar campaigns for women's rights led by religious women themselves.

For example, Mary Katzenstein's (1999) work demonstrates how Christian feminists use 'discursive activism' in the West, in response to the case of the Episcopal/Catholic church and its refusal to ordain women, to reshape the church's understandings of faith and social justice and opt to reform the institution from within, as opposed to exiting their religious community. Other scholars expand upon this

feminist contribution to institutionalized power in Christianity by reconceptualizing how the 'Creator' is referred to with masculinized language (Keller 1998; Ruether 1983; Daly 1973). Catherine Keller argues that "the matter of God-language and thus of its gender is no trivial or supernatural pursuit, but a way of encoding the gender of ultimate values" (Keller 1998: 226). Whether it is in response to the masculine appropriation of power through ordination or the metaphor of the 'First Person,' feminists have emerged in the Christian tradition to challenge the gendered interpretation of authority, in a way that is similar to some Muslim feminists' campaigns for imam rights.

Feminists have similarly emerged in the Buddhist tradition around issues of ordination and authority. While the female ordination of bhikkhunis (monks) is more widely practiced in Buddhist communities, feminist scholars and activists still fight against different levels of recognition, education and financial status between male and female monks. Again, instead of exiting their religious community, Buddhist feminists turn to the scriptures and argue that the Buddha would not have allowed female ordination if he intended for the two genders to be unequal.

Hindu feminists also use scriptural references to female authority, but in the form of female mythological characters. Kathleen M. Erndl, for instance, focuses on the Hindu concept of *shakti*, or female power, arguing that "shaktism, with its theology and ritual which place a high valuation on female embodiment, is in fact essentially feminist" (1998: 94). This female power is associated with life-giving properties and Erndl further argues that the "Hindu patriarchal impulse to subordinate women is rooted in the acknowledgment that women are powerful" (1998: 95). Hindu feminists argue that religious mythology does not subordinate women, but insecure males who fear the power the religion grants upon women do.

The Hindu feminist strategy, similar to the reinterpetive strategy of my Muslim respondents, also contextualizes historical translations to include lesbian rights to same-sex marriage in the Hindu tradition. One of the most popular ‘creation’ stories in Bengal, for instance, “tells of a child born of the divinely blessed sexual intercourse between two women who are co-wives, or rather co-widows...[in the] remaining Bengali version, the child is born beautiful and healthy and the creator god Brahma explains that this is because Kama, god of Love...inspired the women’s lovemaking” (Vanita 2004: 127-129). Just as Muslim feminists reinterpret the behavior mandated during the Prophet’s lifetime that respected women’s rights as an indicator for Islam’s egalitarianism, Hindu feminists re-read mythology to understand how women’s rights to same-sex marriage were divinely sanctioned.

Jewish feminists question the Orthodox Jewish community’s rules against numerous similar restrictions on women as the Muslim community, including ordination, segregated prayer services, and hair covering. In examining what they believe to be a cerebral religion that expects followers to adapt to their circumstances around them, some scholars argue that Jewish women asserted their rights to make themselves attractive when they transitioned from wearing veils to donning wigs (Bronner 1993). Even if Jewish followers believed that headcovering was mandated in the Talmud, women argued that they should be free to interpret wigs as appropriate covering that still allows them to adapt to a society in which the practice of headcovering is no longer widely practiced. Similar to Muslim feminists’ reappropriation of veiling discussed in chapter two, some Jewish feminists embrace a dress code sanctioned by their faith, but feel empowered to reinterpret how it may be represented to the public.

If there is abundant evidence, then, that feminists have emerged in not only Islam, but all of the major world religions, why does it still surprise mainstream

feminists when Muslim women make rights claims from *within* the religious framework? Leora Tanenbaum, a Jewish feminist scholar, argues that mainstream feminists see religion as an ‘irrational’ system of belief:

Mainstream feminist thought hasn’t addressed religion all that much. I think in general, intellectuals tend to look down on religion because people who have faith are to some extent admitting that they’re not using reason totally in how they perceive or understand the world. They’re willing to suspend reason, at least in part. I think that makes intellectuals, feminists included, somewhat dismissive. I find that approach very interesting because I consider myself intellectual and feminist.¹⁶⁰

The intellectual trend to which Tanenbaum refers is the secularization thesis, which argues that modernization results in the decreased social significance of religion; religion was once useful as a social ordering system, but modernization’s increased social differentiation, pluralism, and rationalization purportedly leads to religion’s decline. Religious feminism might be surprising, then, because religion itself is seen to be incompatible with the progress associated with modern societies, and, in this case, their progress towards egalitarianism

B. Modernity, Religion, and My Findings

But are modernity and religion as fundamentally incompatible as early secularization scholars believed? The secularization thesis has been criticized by

¹⁶⁰ See “Interview with Leora Tanenbaum: Taking Back God,” February 19, 2009. <http://girlwpen.com/?p=1521>

scholars who argue that empirical facts challenge the prediction of religion's decay in modern society. Some scholars argue that secularization did not necessarily cause a decline in religious belief, but instead prompted a shift in forms of religious expression (Hornsby-Smith 1992), while others argue that specific political and historic factors such as church construction served to undermine religious belief by distributing far too many empty churches across a national landscape (McLeod 1992). And there are still other scholars who suggest that modernity might not be *incompatible* with religion, but instead might allow its followers to reinvent how their religion might adapt to modern circumstances.

My research demonstrates that this might in fact be the case for Muslim feminists in both the UK and US. In order to understand how modernity might enable Muslim women activists to pursue representative and reinterpreted activism, I will recapitulate the major findings from my study. While the overarching theoretical contribution of my research is to restructure feminist theory to include feminists of faith, my research has further implications for the relationship between gender, religion and the state. In my introduction, I proposed three questions that would direct my analysis and illustrate the complicated relationship between gender, religion and the state that my research uncovers. In answering all of these questions, I demonstrated that activists take advantage of modern circumstances—whether it is modern advances in technology that facilitate virtual activism and communication through the internet, or modern displacement through immigration that provides second-generation activists with distance from the cultural interpretations of Islam that prevail in their parents' sending countries.

First, I asked: *Under what circumstances will Muslim women emerge as activists defending their religious identity to feminists rooted in a more secular tradition, while at the same time reclaiming how the Muslim identity has been*

constructed in the West by their male religious contemporaries? In essence, I investigated the circumstances under which Muslim women would pursue feminist campaigns similar to the campaigns of their sisters in other world religions. Accordingly, in chapter two, I demonstrate that debates over Islam's position on gender-justice have historically positioned Western feminists rooted in either a colonial position or a secular tradition against women in Muslim communities. Islam, in particular, is under current scrutiny because of global political events and Muslim women, therefore, become notable targets because of their distinctive dress code. The veil is habitually used as a symbol that not only designates Muslim women apart from non-Muslim women, but also symbolizes Islam's oppressive nature towards women's rights. Hence, I answer the first question about Muslim women's activism by exploring how media activists a) emerge to reclaim what they believe to be Islam's egalitarianism, and b) reconstruct an image of the veiled Muslim woman as one of strength, confidence, voluntary modesty and celebrated diversity. I suggest that this form of representative activism takes advantage of modernity's technological developments to reclaim how veiled Muslim women are understood by the public, by battling for media standing in their own representation. As John Mayer notes, secularism can often be so doctrinaire as to force religious individuals to 'retreat' from the secular world (Mayer 1998); accordingly, my research shows that Muslim women choose to make claims for equality from within the religious framework, as an alternative to the state-based model for women's rights in the West.

In chapter three I engage with an example of how women reclaim the way in which the Muslim identity has been commandeered by males in both British and American Muslim communities. Specifically, I focus on campaigns against domestic violence to demonstrate how activists use hermeneutic strategies to reinterpret Islam's textual teachings on just relations between men and women in private family life.

Activists contend that the androcentric, or male-biased, interpretations offered by male religious leaders are also primocentric, in that they use the first generation male as a point of reference and incorrectly conflate misogynist traditions from immigrant sending countries with Islam's teachings. In order to divorce traditions from religious doctrine, Muslim women activists engage in reinterpetive activism to offer a new egalitarian Muslim identity in both countries that takes advantage of modernity through the education and scholarship that probes sacred texts for alternative translation.

Next, I asked: *How do Muslim women reconcile their gender and religious identities when they conflict, particularly when the multicultural political project in Western liberal democracies might protect group rights made in the name of religion that violate the liberal rights of the group's female members?* If secular democracies are meant to protect the liberal rights of their people, despite religious group claims that might violate group members, then it would seem that religion and modernity are in conflict. In chapters two and three, however, I sort how activists' make claims that reconcile their gender and religious identities according to their arenas of discourse. Chapter two describes representative claims that activists make in the *public sphere*, usually engaging the media's *misrepresentation* of the Muslim woman, which necessitates creating alternative media outlets and images. Chapter three demonstrates reinterpetive claims that activists make within the *private sphere* of Muslim communities themselves, which necessitates intracommunal communication that tries to convince fellow Muslims that misogynistic practices are the result of *misinterpreted* Islamic teachings. In order to be a proper Muslim, activists argue to community members, individuals must follow egalitarian interpretations of Islam. And it is modernity that allows for the reimagination and reinvention of what actually comprises the Muslim identity in group rights claims. I conclude that, in both public

and private spheres, activists emphasize the intersectional importance of their religious *and* gender identities—being a strong woman and a good Muslim are portrayed as fundamentally compatible qualities. I will discuss my research’s contributions to intersectionality theory in more detail in the next section, when I discuss the restructuring of feminist theory that is needed, but my respondents’ efforts to reconcile their gender identities with their religious identities demonstrates that intersectionality analysis must include feminists of faith.

And, finally, I asked: *How do second generation Muslim women activists challenge our assumptions about linear, unidirectional assimilation and the incorporation of diversity in Western mainstream cultures?* Just as there are assumptions about modernity’s ‘linear’ appeal—as in, the more modern a society becomes, the more advanced and universally beneficial it is—assimilation faces the same linear expectations. Subsequent generations are expected to assimilate to the host society and blur minority group differences as they acclimate to majority norms. Yet, my research in chapter three demonstrates that second-generation Muslim women in both countries challenge our assumptions about assimilation by underlining their minority religious identity. As explained in my first chapter, my research expands upon an idea proposed by three main assimilation models—1-Portes and Zhou’s (1992) segmented assimilation model; 2-Alba and Nee’s (2003) model that argues the majority is reshaped by minority assimilation; 3- Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters and Holdaway’s (2009) model that stress the second generation has a distinct *advantage* over native born racial and ethnic minorities: namely, that the second generation might in fact ‘creatively’ combine elements of the mainstream culture with aspects of their parental ethnic heritage in order to be upwardly mobile in society. I find that the religious identity, enabled by modernity, is particularly conducive to this creative

reimagination of a minority identity and believe this conclusion has implications for future research on immigrant incorporation and the multicultural political project.

While recent scholarship theorizes different paths that the second generation can take in assimilating to the mainstream society, my research makes two important contributions to the current scholarship's theoretical oversights. First, there has thus far been little empirical research on the second generation that proves or disproves these three models, and the little that does exist largely avoids religious identity in discussions of racial and ethnic minorities. My findings offer second generation Muslim women as an important empirical example of individuals who purposely highlight their minority religious identity, over racial or ethnic identities, which is a minority identity that is often overlooked in the post-1965 assimilation literature. Second, assimilation theory seems to take for granted the idea that those second generation individuals who selectively maintain elements of their ethnic heritage simply preserve the heritage as it has been taught to them by their parents. Instead, my findings demonstrate that it is indeed important to second generation women in both countries to have the ability to re-imagine their religion in a manner that is *distinct* from their parents' interpretation. They argue that each state's multicultural project that aims to manage difference frames the immigrant minority identity in primocentric terms—that is, the state takes the first generation as its point of reference, effectively obscuring the second generation's interests in constructing their own minority identity. This may happen because the state holds similar assumptions as assimilation scholars about the minority identity being most salient in the first generation and dissolving in a linear fashion with subsequent generations; moreover, if ethnic culture/values continue in the second generation they will essentially be faded versions of those present in the first generation. Yet, as more second generation

American and British Muslims highlight their Muslim identities, these assumptions about linear and unidirectional assimilation must be further interrogated.

Linear assimilation was first challenged by Marcus Lee Hansen in 1938, in an essay he titled “The problem of the third generation immigrant.” Hansen coined the idea that would later be popularized by Will Herberg (1954)—namely, “what the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember” (Hansen 1938: 7). This theory, otherwise known as Hansen’s Law, tried to explain why the third generation might be more willing than the second generation to take pride in their ethnic past. Second generation individuals, he theorized, would be weighed down by insecurities of their foreign parentage and would constantly strive to prove their Americanness; third generation individuals, however, would be secure in their Americanness and feel free to explore and record their heritage through the formation of associations (Hansen 1938).

Because Hansen and Herberg tackled immigration during a period in the twentieth century when its flow had diminished because of restrictive legislation, it is likely that their predictions for third generation Americans were largely informed by the behavior of second generation immigrants who were suffering through a particularly strong xenophobic period. Hansen described the second generation he addressed: “They were subjected to the criticism and taunts of the native Americans and to the criticism and taunts of their elders as well...the delinquency of the second generation was talked about so incessantly that finally little Fritz and little Hans became convinced that they were not like the children from the other side of the tracks” (Hansen 1938: 4). It might be argued that the contemporary second generation, in contrast to Hansen’s second generation, does not face the same *type* of discrimination and pressure towards assimilation because of the multicultural project’s progress in each respective state, yet it is important to note that xenophobia remains a

significant social problem. Hansen's theory does, however, underline the importance of acknowledging the context of the receiving society. In early 1900s America (Hansen's context), for example, immigration legislation reflected strong public opinion against immigration. Starting in 1965, however, immigration legislation changed significantly and began to open America's borders to more immigrants.

My second generation respondents suggest that highlighting their religious identity does not necessarily separate them from mainstream society—in other words, in contrast to Hansen's fears, some children of Muslim immigrants do not believe it necessary to abandon their religious identity to feel American or British. In both countries, activists voluntarily distance themselves from traditional customs of their parents' sending countries, but seek to distinguish their religion from these practices. Instead of distancing themselves from Islam, activists are attracted to the religion and try to reclaim what they believe to be its original egalitarianism. While there is close to no research on a Muslim third generation in America and scarcely any research on the third generation in Britain, my research suggests that the second generation in both countries hastens to forge connections to their religious—not necessarily parental—heritage that Hansen and Herberg assumed would not develop until the third generation.

As I demonstrated in chapter five, although both British and American Muslim women believe that they are constructing a new British or American egalitarian version of Islam, only in America does this attachment to a religious identity align with the mainstream narrative of a 'religious country.' This in turn reinforces the fact that religious activists—regardless of their particular religious beliefs—play an important role in American history. By situating American Muslim women activists' struggle for gender equality in the context of religious reform movements throughout

American history, it becomes clear that my research has implications for America's continued commitment to religious freedom and individual rights. Specifically, I suggest that the American state would be best advised to protect these liberal rights, in the interest of encouraging diverse voices to emerging from minority communities.

C. Intersectionality Theory and the Religious Identity

As I discussed above, I consider one of the largest implications of my research to be its contribution to the feminist study of intersectionality. Not only has intersectionality theory marginalized the religious identity (despite the large body of evidence that demonstrates women do indeed reconcile their gender and religious identities in all of the world's major religions), but the literature has also been surprisingly silent on the question of how historical and institutional context impacts gender and religious identities. Some scholars have addressed the influence national context might have on intersectionality theory, particularly in how identities and social structures might interact with one another in different ways (e.g. additively, multiplicatively, interactively) (Weldon 2008). Yet, this contextual analysis stops at national borders and fails to make use of comparative analysis to determine how intersectionality might play out differently in women's lives in different countries.

My research attends to this shortcoming, however, by examining the different role that religion plays in both countries and its consequential effect on how the religious identity that interacts with gender is constructed in the first place. As my last chapter demonstrated, religious identity has a unique, fairly respected place in the American national narrative that its counterpart in Britain does not share. Institutionally speaking, then, if intersectionality theory is called to consider the religious identity's intersection with gender, we must know more about the institutional context within which the religious identity has developed. My research

suggests that whether that identity is stifled or enabled affects the quality of the activism that its interaction with gender produces. Similarly, the institutional and national context should be explored for the other identities that are usually taken for granted within intersectionality theory as well—race, class, and ethnicity are all constructed in particular contexts, with certain groups privileged or discriminated against at different moments in time. Without a deeper understanding of the environments that shape these group differences, the attempt to take into account the multiple oppressions that women face appears half-hearted.

II. IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPARATIVE POLITICS STUDIES

While my research suggests that further research should be conducted that applies intersectionality theory to comparative studies across national contexts to investigate the institutional context behind certain identities, I also believe my study holds lessons for broader comparative political studies as well. My research design originally sought to investigate the surprising similarities emerging among two Muslim populations conventionally considered to be significantly different from one another. As I explored the similarities, however, I began to see notable diversity *within* activist campaigns on the same gender-justices issues, in both the public and private spheres. In essence, my research design evolved into a two-level investigation—the first level looking at similarities and the second level examining differences. The results of these investigations at both levels yield interesting findings in political science, which suggests that political scientists might be better served, moving forward, if they consider how to calibrate the study of *both* similarity and difference within a singular paired comparison. In the subfield of comparative politics in particular, the paired comparison is a popular choice of research design, yet one that is often limited to *either* a most-similar systems design that illuminates causal

variables that generate different outcomes or a most-different systems design that outlines causal variables that produce similar outcomes.

In the first place, it is interesting that differences in education, employment, health and basically every other socio-economic indicator between the country's two Muslim populations do *not* trump the similar grounds on which these women share injustice: gender and generation. It is fascinating that activists in both countries, across race, class, ethnic group, and education, generate similar forms of gender-justice claims in each country's public and private spheres. Though it has not generated significant levels of transnational activism thus far, some global efforts have emerged on the internet and could certainly be a direction for future research on this topic.

In the second place, however, it is even more interesting that there is variation among activists who claim to be fighting the same gender-justice struggles. The ways in which claims are framed vary—they are either transformative revolutionary challenges to underlying systems of power that lead to misinterpretations, or affirmative descriptive corrections to those misinterpretations without challenging the system that generated them. And it has been the argument of the second half of this dissertation that those variations are caused by different state contexts. On one hand, the British state essentially stifles transformative frames from emerging by placing obstacles in the Muslim women activists' course by appointing male leaders to represent the British Muslim community. The American state, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of religious freedom as a Constitutional liberal right and believes that, if one respects this right, one must respect other liberal rights, such as free speech. It is in this environment, where the government does not interfere in religious community representation and American Muslims are allowed to compete for their own free market representation and interpretation, that some American

Muslim women activists choose to try transformative frames for gender-justice claims within their religious framework.

If my analysis had simply chosen to focus on the similarity *or* diversity among British and American Muslim women activists, I would have surely missed a large part of the story with such a limited design. On one hand, if I had only engaged with the similarities, I would have overlooked the scope of my analysis that speaks to the importance of the state's relationship with its religious communities. On the other hand, if I had focused on the differences, I would have missed the individual level variables of gender and generation that trump many other SES indicators in predicting the political identification processes of second generation Muslim women in the West.

Contemporary controversies that ask each state to determine how comfortable it is with allowing Muslims to be Muslims hold incredible significance to the type of activism that emerges among its young Muslim populations. If my dissertation suggests any implications for the state's approach to questions of headscarves, cartoons, or mosques, it is that the more a country tries to regulate religious behavior, the more it effectively stifles diverse interpretations within religious communities. And, as my research shows, this variety sometimes contains the seeds of liberal dissent or religious reform within Islam that may lead to greater compatibility /convergence between Islamic and Western democratic values—particularly women's rights.

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