

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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Navigating between the Religious and the Secular:
Responding to the Muslim 'Woman Question' in Diasporic Britain

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Women's Studies

by

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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Professor Sondra Hale, Chair

This study is a story of the multiple sides of subject formation, the ways in which immigrant practice, cultural and religious, and the norms of British civil society operate in relation, each responding to the other. In this work I challenge generalized third-person notions of Muslim women as sites of oppression, and place British Muslim women at the center of their own stories. I investigate how South Asian Muslim women in Britain navigate between competing religio-cultural and secular discourse. In order to address gender discrimination in Muslim communities and at the same time, resist external ethnic, and religious stereotyping, I examine the following questions: How is Islamic identity asserted away from the “homeland,” and moreover, what are the larger consequences of these assertions to women? What are the mechanisms whereby Muslim women construct, challenge, contest, collaborate in, and negotiate religio-cultural readings of Islam? My work is at the crossroads of Islamic feminist theory, and immigration/diaspora studies. I draw on data collected through ethnographic work (in-depth interviews and media analyses) conducted in Birmingham, Britain. By analyzing the construction of women-only spaces, development of Muslim-centric media and the adoption of Islamic

fashion, I demonstrate how British Muslim women respond to the Muslim “woman question” in a diasporic space and further postulate ways to integrate Muslim sensibilities into the secular public.

This dissertation of Sabah Firoz Uddin is approved.

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DEDICATION

To my Ismi – a welcome distraction.

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Chapter 1 – Overview and Theoretical Framework

In this study, I investigate how South Asian Muslim women in Britain navigate between competing discourses of the religious and the secular and how their navigation relates to concepts of citizenship, nation and the notion of a religio-cultural Islam. Further, I explore the diverse iterations of Islam outside the context of their imagined Muslim homeland. The dilemma for women in this study is to address the gender discrimination that exists in their diasporic community and yet avoid contributing to both the stereotypes and ethnic, racial, and religious discrimination that is external to these Muslim communities. My aim is to develop theoretical responses to the following broad research questions: How does the case of British South Asian Muslim women in Birmingham give us more information about how Islamic identity, in general, is asserted away from the “homeland,” and moreover, what are the larger consequences of these assertions for Muslim women? What are the mechanisms whereby Muslim women, in this particular context, construct, challenge, contest, collaborate in, and negotiate religio-cultural¹ readings of Islam? Emanating from these macro research questions are the following sub-sets of questions that relate to my case study:

1. What is the organizational structure of the Muslim diasporic community? Where are the moral boundaries defined in physical space? How are Muslim women located within the physical space? How do women in these communities navigate between public and private spaces?

¹ I define “religio-cultural” Islam as a hybrid of culture and religion – an identity that takes form in transit from “home” to host country. In this context, “religio-cultural” Islam is piecemeal of Islamic theology and South Asian traditions. Informed by Edward Said’s “traveling theory,” “religio-cultural” Islam is nourished as it travels through four distinct stages as laid out by Said. First, there is a point of origin, where the concept enters discourse. Secondly, the concept “moves from an earlier point, to another time and place”. Third, the transplanted concept, confronts conditions of acceptance or resistance. Lastly, the now wholly or partly accommodated concept is “transformed by its uses “ and “acquires a new position [or status of authority] in a new time or place” Edward Said, *The World, The Text, and the Critic*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 227.

2. Who is thought to be the “ideal Muslim woman,” and by whom? How do women negotiate “womanhood” within “lived” Islam? What are the points of struggle and how are they negotiated?

3. How do South Asian Muslim women respond to the Muslim “woman question” in Britain?

BACKGROUND, AND SCOPE:

Islam and Islamic Feminism: Evolving from a scholarly interest in Islamic feminism,² this project took form as a desire to explore the translation of a formulaic theoretical concept to its use in everyday life. In brief, Islamic feminism and its derivatives--“Islamist feminism,” “faith-based” feminism,” “Muslim feminism”-- is a reform-oriented religious feminism, approached within an Islamic discursive framework, and rooted philosophically in concepts of gender equality and gender justice. Islamic feminism operates with the understanding that while God created the Qu’ran, man, in contrast, interpreted the Shari’a. Thus many Islamic feminists argue that men have integrated the Shari’a with pre-Islamic customs and interpreted it for their own purposes. Islamic rules have been “selectively applied, emphasized or ignored in accordance with the individual or group interests and current realities of each area.” Moreover, Islamic feminists argue Shari’a has been widely misused as “a rationale to justify and strengthen patriarchy” (Tohidi 1998, 279).

² This is reflected in, but not limited to, the writings of Asma Barlas. *“Believing Women” in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran*. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002); miriam cooke. *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature*. (New York: Routledge, 2001); Fatima. Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam*. (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 1991).

Many Islamic feminists intimate that contemporary assumptions about gender in Muslim societies are a product of the historical development of the methods of inquiry.³ More specifically, at issue is the critical role human agency has played in the conception and development of normative Islam. The Prophet's death in 632 marked an "important shift in the dynamics of the consultative process" (Masud 1996, 6). At this juncture, Islamic law, as we know it, did not exist nor did it for the greater part of the first century A.H. In fact, the systematic development of Shari'a, as it came to be known and accepted by Muslims today, began with the early Abbasid era (after 750 CE). Abdullahi An-Naim concludes that the emergence of the major schools of thought (*madhahib*, singular *madhhab*), the authoritative collection of *Sunnah* as the second and more detailed source of Shari'a, and the development of its essential methodology (*usul al-fiqh*) took place about 150-250 years after the Prophet's death.⁴ Thus, a number of Islamic feminists take the position that the "first several generations of Muslims could not have known and applied Shari'a as it came to be accepted by Muslims for the last one thousand years" (An-Naim 2002, 5).

Most Islamic historians agree that to establish a mechanism for the transmission of both the Qur'an and prophetic *Hadith* (oral traditions attributed to the Prophet transmitted by his companions), generations of Muslims have relied on the human element in the process of transmitting knowledge. Beginning in the second century, the acquisition and analysis of Islamic

³ See the work of Amina Wadud. *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) for an in-depth analysis of Islamic feminist methodology.

⁴ For a detailed history of Islamic theology, see the works of Hisham M. Ramadan, ed. *Understanding Islamic Law* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2006); Fazlur Rahman. *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Wael B. Hallaq. *A History of Islamic Legal Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Tilman Nagel. *The History of Islamic Theology* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000).

knowledge have been designated to “qualified” persons. This special class of literate scholars “acquired religious authority analogous to that exercised by the Prophet” (Masud 1996, 8). In centers of Islamic scholarship we see the rise of men, who contributed to the developing of Islamic law. The point of contention is to not to reject the authority and authenticity of such men, but rather to elucidate further two points. First, which scholars were deemed qualified to possess “knowledge and moral probity” (Masud 1996, 8)? Many Islamic feminists contend that women were unrightfully excluded from this process. Second, Islamic feminists return to the point of human agency. Ultimately, each tradition attributed to the Prophet is the “end-product of an authorial enterprise” (Abou El Fadl 2001, 88). That is the enterprise must include those who selected, remembered and transmitted the report within a context of time and place. Khaled Abou El Fadl elaborates this reality. He suggests that this authorial enterprise cannot be objective. He writes:

There is the issue of creative selection and recollection. Those who experienced the life of the Prophet, interacted and talked to him, did not experience the Prophet in some ideal objective medium. The Companions and others experienced the Prophet in a subjective fashion, and this subjectivity influenced what they saw or heard, how they saw or heard it, and what they ultimately remembered and conveyed to others. Therefore the personality of the transmitter of a report is indelibly imprinted upon the report transmitted. In fact, each generation of transmitters has its own subjectivities that cause it to remember some reports and not others, and to authenticate some reports and not others (88).

Moreover, Abou El Fadl asks: Who decides the meaning of a text? There are limitations and boundaries obliged on language, and as such, “meaning cannot be determined exclusively by the author or reader” (88). Instead, the author or reader has the “ability to impose whatever meaning he or she wishes upon the text” (90). Thus, it is conceivable, that with regard to gender relations, scholars, anchored within a subjective reality, may have re-inscribed local customs and

traditions. For example, Abou El Fadl makes a telling inquiry into the determinations of spousal obedience. He concedes that “the traditions attributed to the Prophet” (211) and not Qu’ranic discourse play the primary role in determinations. The most notable in which the Prophet says:

It is not lawful for anyone to prostrate to anyone. But if I would have ordered any person to prostrate to another, I would have commanded wives to prostrate to their husbands because of the enormity of the rights of husbands over their wives (211).

Given the “grave theological, moral, and social consequences” of citing the “prostration and submission” traditions, Abou El Fadl examines the legitimacy of such claims. He reasons:

The context and structure of the traditions makes them suspect...In the case of the prostration and submission traditions, the evidence suggests that they cannot be relied upon because we cannot conclusively assert that the Prophet played the primary role in the authorial enterprise that produced them. For one, they contradict the theological notion of the undivided supremacy of God and God’s will. In addition, they are inconsistent with the Qur’anic discourse on marriage. The Qur’an states: “From God’s signs is that God created mates for you among yourselves so that you may find repose and tranquility with them, and God has created love and compassion between you”. In addition, these traditions are not consistent with the cumulative reports describing the conduct of the Prophet with his own wives...There are numerous reports by the Prophet’s wives asserting that the Prophet never struck or insulted any one of them, and that his demeanor with his wives was gentle and playful, and that he would frequently seek their counsel. These reports cast an image of the Prophet, as a husband, that is very different from the image advocated by the prostrating and submission tradition (214-5).

Abou El Fadl insists on considering the “totality of evidence” to ascertain the veracity of suspect traditions. He emphasizes the paramount importance of weighted questions, such as “considering the patriarchal society in which Islam was revealed, what are chances that the Prophet did, in fact, prohibit the act of prostrating to him, but the authorial enterprise added the part about the prostration of wives?” Or “the circumstances of the individuals engaged in the authorial enterprise” (215)?

Incontrovertibly most Islamic feminists take the position that the construction of Islamic legal discourse has been a human endeavor and thus, they challenge the neo-conservative resistance to change and interpretation. They see Islam as neither unitary nor unchanging, but rather as a religion that can accommodate growth. It is their contention that Islam has given ample latitude in the interpretation and implementation of its original texts and instead, it is the “sacralization” of tradition that has created a mutable/immutable binary. That is, as Muslim scholars elevated Islamic legal verdicts to a sacrosanct status, it correspondingly has restricted the role of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) in the development of jurisprudence, and instead, privileged the doctrine of imitation or following of previous scholars (*taqlid*). After the 11th century, all Muslim jurists are said to have followed one of the established law schools. They are said to have worked with “stable, sacred texts and settled doctrines: their task was one of explaining and applying the law, not of interpreting it” (Tucker 1998, 11). The main mental activity was supposedly *taqlid*, “the acceptance and application of the doctrines of established schools and jurists.” (11) *Taqlid* said to have removed the possibility of independent interpretation and reasoning, and in effect, closed the door of *ijtihad*. In the view of Islamic feminists, the lasting consequence of this closure was that Islamic jurisprudence has become “a theoretical construct without history, it has become a form of arcane and mummified knowledge that has little or nothing to do with the social experiences of Muslims” (11).

To refute the fundamentalist interpretations of key verses, Islamic feminists propose a rereading of the Quran. This model of renewal and reform advocates the practice of *ijtihad*, which involves “individual inquiry into religion and its interpretation in the light of new socioeconomic needs” (Badran 1994, 208). The practice of feminist *ijtihad* draws on the Qu’ran, and Hadith and “offers a critique of Islamic history or hermeneutics” (cooke, 61). Islamic

feminists challenge conventional histories that suggest Islam's scripture tolerates sexual oppression. Instead, they seek to ask the questions whether Islam in fact,

teaches that God has a special relationship with males or that males embody divine attributes and that women are by nature weak, unclean, or sinful. Further does it teach that rule by the father/husband is divinely ordained and earthly continuation of God's Rule, as religious and traditional patriarchies claim (Barlas 2002, 1).

Moreover, Islamic feminists ask how oppressive practices, veiled as custom or tradition, materialize and how such practices have been created "to suit certain interests and to preserve the power of certain sections of the community" (Narain 2001, 77).

Islamic feminists employ a methodology that involves verifying the authenticity of the Hadith, and further, where incompatibilities with the Qu'ran are found, Islamic feminists call for the reconciliation of Sunnah with the Qu'ranic view. The most common issues are "re-evaluation of Islamic sources, criticism of the use of Islamic sources, criticism of interpretations of Islamic sources, and equality of men and women in the Qu'ran" (Roald 1998, 25). Islamic feminists argue misogynistic readings stem from an "uncritical adherence to what are assumed to be Islamic norms and scriptures" (Barlas 2002: 4). Riffat Hassan provides explanations for the prevailing theological assumptions:

Firstly, the patriarchal environment in Muslim society has made Islamic scholars during history interpret Islamic sources in terms of male hegemony. Secondly, many hadith with negative attitudes toward women are in circulation in Muslim society although their authenticity has been questioned and their popularity, even among Islamic scholars, points to the view of women as subordinate to men, as being deeply embedded in Muslim society (Hassan 1990, 103)

Islamic feminism operates with the understanding that interpretations of Islamic law (based on the Qu'ran and Hadith) are neither unchanging nor structured hierarchically (top-down). As a

result, *ijtihad* allows for independent reasoning. It involves the reinterpretation of the Qu'ran and a semantic analysis of the Shari'a, without "privileging the identity and status of the individual interpreter" (cooke 2001, 62).

Islamic feminists work to challenge the assumption that the Qu'ran is a patriarchal or misogynistic text, and further, does not advocate liberation for women. Instead, they argue that:

descriptions of Islam as a religious patriarchy that allegedly has 'God on its side' confuse the Quran with a specific reading of it, ignoring that all texts, including the Quran, can be read in multiple modes, including egalitarian ones (Barlas 2002, 4).

While Islamic feminists never question the authenticity and sacrality of the Qu'ran, they do, however, examine the gendered formation of Islamic epistemology and the "temporality of its interpretations" (cooke 2001, xii). It involves looking at the specific contexts of the Qu'ranic revelation and secondary religious texts, and moreover, applying "this understanding to the present so as to question the ways in which Islamic knowledge has been produced" (cooke 2002, 62). Situated within this theoretical paradigm, most Islamic feminists work to provide a holistic reading of Islam as a tool of empowerment. Islamic feminists have recast the definition of feminism. While they strongly reject the Western feminist label, they employ similar ideas and strategies. The goal is to develop a feminist ideology that elaborates the importance of religion.

Islamic feminist Hiba Rauf (Cairo University) explains:

Feminist questions can be very useful to us. When I read some feminist writings and saw what they were about, they helped me very much and gave some ideas. But I always go back to my Qu'ranic dictionary, to see if I can use the term (quoted in Badran 1994, 213).

Rauf suggests the challenge lies in expressing the fundamentals of feminism to empower Muslim women without transcending the boundaries of Islam.

Islam in Diaspora and the Research Dilemmas: The purpose for my research was first, to explore the ways in which the principles of Islamic feminism can materialize in a diasporic social landscape, and second, to interrogate the pragmatic viability of Islamic feminism as an effectual mode of activism within religious and non-religious discourse. More specifically, my hope was to determine whether the conditions of diaspora create an intellectual space whereby the conditions can produce alternatives to dominating religious narratives. To this point Peter Mandaville, in *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (2001), advances the argument that, as populations migrate and disperse, religion also travels. He puts forward the idea of a “traveling Islam” in the West defining it as a “translocal” Islam. This Islam is able to function within a discursive space⁵ where diasporic hybridity can disrupt the power of “Muslim hegemony,”⁶ a “translocal” space where Muslims can dispute the hegemonic religious authority of the ulama, and a space where Muslims are “vested with the capacity to practice ijtihad...and subvert genealogies of power” (88), and where, they can demand a process of renegotiating political and religious identity and theological debate. Migration and resettlement, he argues, produce a “complex hybrid condition, one in which Islamic meanings shift, change and transmute” and “provide fertile venues for the rethinking and reformulation of tradition and the construction of an Islam for generations to come” (115). Emerging from this renewal and reformulation is a “Muslim public sphere” that enables and encourages the deployment of a new critical Islam. In response to this new condition of diaspora, Mandaville suggests that Muslim women, in particular, are transgressing gender norms and making the dialectical move of

⁵ Mandaville is influenced by Homi Bhabha’s articulation of the “Third Space.” Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁶ By “Muslim hegemony,” Mandaville refers to “those sources of social authority in Islam, which seek to represent themselves as the privileged readers of tradition or the bearers of ‘true’ Islam” (2001, 94).

embracing the spiritual and moral ethos of Islam while questioning the efficacy of traditional authority. He offers the following example:

Members of the Al-Nisa women's group in London and grassroots organizations in Bradford, Birmingham, and other places, spend hours every week analyzing the kind of Islam that would help to empower them instead of limiting their capacities. They talk openly and passionately about contraception, abortion, rape, the education of their children, how men can be better fathers and husbands, geopolitical changes and ecological problems (141-2).

If one concedes that Islamic feminism extends beyond engaging in process of hermeneutics, then one confronts the question: in what ways are Muslim women extending the social, political and economic boundaries that were previously unavailable to them? My research aspired to minimize the contentious relationship between feminism and religion. I wanted to show how Islamic feminism is meaningful in destabilizing conventional religio-cultural scripts and providing new emancipatory possibilities, in accord with Islamic pedagogy, for challenging Muslim cultural patriarchy.

At the Crossroads of Postcolonial Thought, Islamic and Diasporic Studies, and Transnational Gender Studies: What I failed to account for was the degree of religiosity within the communitarian space, which then generated more research questions. Did the diasporic site in fact, produce a religious masculine or feminine subject? Were there theological implications underscoring the normative assumptions about gender and morality? My research required a theoretical shift whereby I did not think of religiosity in its various manifestations as a natural state of being among the population under study. Instead, I attempt to push my work beyond narrow theological boundaries, and employ a discursive strategy, which draws attention to the multiple discourses that compete within the same space. My project intervenes at the crossroads of post-colonial thought, Islamic studies, diasporic studies and transnational gender studies. I

have derived from these specific theoretical bodies of work, a distinct lens through which I have developed my study. Central to this work are the ways bodies of knowledge generate and circulate in the service of colonial power relations.

By analyzing the impact of Western colonialism, notable theorists including Frantz Fanon⁷, Albert Memmi⁸ and Aimé Césaire,⁹ produced a psychological portrait of the colonizer and the colonized, the latter having been shaped by the policies of the former. For the aforementioned authors, the creation of the binary opposition of colonizer and “Other” was a necessary tool to construct a racial and cultural hierarchy to place the colonizer in a relationship of power over the colonized. Further, characteristic to the colonizer/colonized encounter is exploitation and domination based on contempt for the barbaric native and its uncivilized culture.

Aimé Césaire decries:

Between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses...No human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production (1950, 42).

Following Césaire, Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon share in a similar understanding of the colonized people. Memmi writes of the colonialist as “privileged,” whereby:

Every act of his daily life places him in a relationship with the colonized, and with each act his fundamental advantage is demonstrated...From the time of his birth, he possesses a qualification independent of his personal merits or his actual class. He is part of the group of colonizers whose values are sovereign. The colony follows the cadence of his traditional holidays, even

⁷ See *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), and *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961).

⁸ See *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

⁹ See *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review, 1950).

religious holidays, and not those of the inhabitants. The weekly day of rest is that of his native country; it is his nation's flag which flies over the monuments, his mother tongue which permits social communication. Even his dress, his accent and his manners are eventually imitated by the colonized. The colonizer partakes of an elevated world from which he automatically reaps the privileges (1965,13).

Fanon reads the colonizer/colonized relationship as falling into two camps: “the white and the black;” the black relegated to “zone of nonbeing” (8). Fanon observes the white/European as “classifying, imprisoning, primitivizing and decivilizing [the black man]” (1965, 32), for according to the white/European, the black man has “no culture, not civilization, no ‘long historical past’” (34). With the colonial gaze fixed on the colonized, colonial policy, therefore, reflected an authorial structure asserting a moralizing mission to domesticate the native and its local cultural, social and religious prescriptions.

In the postcolonial diasporic landscape, the colonizer/colonized relationship is fundamentally more complicated as the former colonized are finding opportunities to destabilize colonialist discourse and gain access to equal footing with the colonizer. However, I believe such opportunities do not dismantle this firmly entrenched modality of thinking (civilized/savage), and accordingly, in the diaspora, the former colonists still remain steadfast in their rule of authority over the former colonized. The uneven impact of Western colonialism has generated a long-standing binary opposition along an ideological narrative of colonial difference-- a difference that promotes the cultural superiority of Euroamericancentrism and produces the inferior eastern “other.” Memmi (1965) termed the narrative “colonial racism.” He outlines its three ideological components, which I contend are applicable today:

One, the gulf between the culture of the colonialist and the colonized; two, the exploitation of these differences for the benefit of the colonialist; three, the use of these supposed differences as standards of absolute fact (71).

Further expanding, Memmi writes:

The colonialist stresses those things which keep him separate, rather than emphasizing that which might contribute to the foundation of a joint community. In those differences, the colonized is always degraded and the colonialist finds justification for rejecting his subjects. But perhaps the most important thing is that once the behavioral feature, or historical or geographical factor which characterizes the colonialist and contrasts him with the colonizer, has been isolated, this gap must be kept from being filled. The colonialist removes the factor from history, time, and therefore possible evolution. What is actually a sociological point becomes labeled as being biological or, preferably, metaphysical. It is attached to the colonized's basic nature. (71).

As a result, the immigrant's community and specific communitarian particularities are conceptualized as distinct and inferior from the larger collective and subsumed under this grand meta-narrative, whereby privilege, as Memmi conceived it, continues to belong to the white European, or specifically in this project, the British. I argue that the practice of immigrant policy as explored in this work, perhaps a response to the circulation of enduring colonial ideology positions some immigrant subjects into an intractable paradigm of reified difference.

South Asians in British Diaspora: I contend that a study of South Asians in the British diaspora¹⁰ necessitates an understanding of the ways in which these historical encounters with the British colonizers shaped the collective conscious of the colonized people in the Indian subcontinent, which I further argue, continue to gain currency in present-day Britain. Specifically, the nexus of this research lies with the colonial critical posture on the native's

¹⁰ In this context, I like Cagler's description of a diaspora whereby diaspora is an ethnic collective space where persons have "multilocal and translocal attachments," and can celebrate their "hybrid identities." Ayse S. Cagler "Hyphenated Identities and the Limits of 'Culture'," *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community*, ed. Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (New York: Zed Books, 1997), 170.

religious practice, and how it contributes to this polemical occident/orient divide.¹¹ Drawing upon Said's idea of Islamic Orientalism,¹² in this work I see the reductive notion of a primitive and dangerous Islam a key site of contention in present-day diasporic British politics. Despite the temporal/spatial shift, colonialist practice continues to be reinforced, thus reproducing the colonizer/colonized paradigm of power in the diaspora. The modes of interaction between both categories remain stable, and thus, we continue to witness a similar representation of otherness. In current-day Europe, the underpinning of the national narrative roots itself in historical imperial ideologies so that the formation of the immigrant subject position continues to embed itself in polarities. Where the West represents itself as "rational, familiar, moral, just and Christian," the immigrant, in contrast, reflects the nature of the Orient: "irrational, exotic, erotic, despotic and heathen" (Lewis 1996, 16). In exile from its homeland, the native becomes the traveling native, whose religious and cultural customs/traditions are mediated through the imbalanced relationship with the former colonial apparatus.

The dislocation of the immigrant from the site of colonial to postcolonial politics, I restate, did not, undermine the moralizing ideas referenced above, and thus, continue to mediate in postcolonial identity formation in the diaspora. Religious and cultural precepts remain a signification of otherness and continue to highlight a positionally inferior subject. The

¹¹ Addressing, this divide in his seminal text, *Orientalism*, Edward Said describes Orientalism as a Western discipline of knowledge about the Orient. Set off against the Occident or Western European experience, the Orient sits uncomfortably in a "relationship of power and domination" (1978:5). Dependent upon a collective, "hegemonic" idea of Europe, Said argues that Orientalism that the major component in European culture is "the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples, cultures and Oriental backwardness" (7). He writes: "Along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien. Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or – as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory-taken over" (207).

¹² See discussion in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 236-7.

postcolonized subject position reflects the enterprise of formulating a religio-cultural identity; a reactive oppositional identity constructed “by contrasting the indigenous culture and its values to those of the West, calling for a rejection of the latter” (Narayan 1997, 14). In this new societal context, the collective immigrant body self-negotiates and deploys this religio-culture to impose conformity among its members.

South Asian Muslims Answering the “Woman Question”: For my research subjects, there are ideas circulating of what home demands from its transnational citizens, and to this point, the norms and practices affecting women in particular are upheld as a distinguishing feature of South Asian tradition; continuities of a gendered “tradition, (often imagined continuities) over assimilation, adaptation and change” are stressed (Narayan 1997, 22). The ideal South Asian Muslim woman is a composite of pre-existing codes of femininity produced in relation to the colonial British moral narrative. A holdover from the structure of colonial racism, gender inequalities continue in the ideological service of sustaining the dichotomy between western and immigrant culture. The South Asian diasporic script, in particular, is constitutive of a sacred world-view that imbues women with moral superiority and bearers of cultural authenticity; women are the medium through which the religio-cultural links to home remain intact.

Revisiting colonial history discloses the origins of this peripatetic post-colonial religio-cultural dogma. Against a colonial backdrop, the religio-cultural practices of Islam and South Asian tradition, with respect to women, emerged as central to the Western narrative of the inferiority of Islam and ultimately to the conflict between the cultures of the colonizers and the colonized. Colonialist discourse was fundamentally organized around the project of civilizing the colonized and reforming what the discourse described as barbaric and oppressive customs,

sanctioned by religious tradition.¹³ Leila Ahmed, in her book *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992), argues that colonial powers such as Britain, invented theories of race and culture, whose underpinnings reflected middle-class Victorian philosophies of presumed superiority. The Victorian woman was imagined as the ideal in this model of the ultimate civilization. Accordingly, British colonial rationale redirected the language of feminism to liberate and civilize the cultures of “other” men. Leila Ahmed argues:

the idea that Other men, men in colonized societies, those beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women, was to be used, in the rhetoric of colonialism to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonial peoples (151).

The colonizers believed that Islam was innately oppressive, and measures such as segregation and the veil not only epitomized that oppression, but also were fundamental in characterizing the backwardness of Islamic societies. For example, veiling from the Western perspective became the target of colonial attack, as it was the most visible symbol to mark the oppression of women and the inferiority of Islam. The West insisted that Muslims reject their religion and customs or at least, reform their religion along recommended lines. Progress on the path of civilization was possible only by abolishing these practices.

In response to the colonial narrative of women and Islam, an oppositional narrative, engineered in resistance, emerged. Refusing to negotiate “the woman question” with the colonial

¹³ Following is an excerpt of account by an early nineteenth century British traveler in India, commenting on the condition of native women: “at no period of life, in no condition of society, should a woman do any thing at her mere pleasure. Their fathers, their husbands, their sons, are verily called her protectors; but it is such protection! Day and night must women be held by their protectors in a state of absolute dependence. A woman, it is never affirmed, is never fit for independence, or to be trusted with liberty...their deity has allotted to women a love of their bed, of their seat, and of ornaments, impure appetites, wrath, flexibility, desire of mischief and bad conduct. Though her husband be devoid of all good qualities, yet, such is the estimate they form of her moral discrimination and sensibilities, that they bind the wife to revere him as a god, and to submit to his corporeal chastisements, whenever he chooses to inflict them, by a cane or a rope, on the back parts” (quoted in Chatterjee 1993, 118-9).

state and further rejecting the state imperative to push their particularized religio-cultural edicts aside in favor of those of the West, the colonized chose to reaffirm the value of their own indigenous customs. The East, was, and continues to be, conceived of as superior to the West in the spiritual realm. Reforming tradition/religion/culture, as demanded by the colonial state, could not mean the wholesale appropriation of Western values. Instead, the colonized needed a distinction between the West and the East to maintain a visibly unique native cultural and religious identity. For example, an obvious means to resist Western domination was to reinforce customs relating to women, the culturally infused symbols of Islam's presumed inferiority.

Fatima Mernissi (1991) offers an explanation:

any changes in Muslim women's conditions were seen as concessions to the colonizer. Since external aspects of women's liberation like abandoning the veil for Western dress were often emulation of Western women, women's liberations were readily identified as a surrender to foreign influences (7).

The woman and her body became a symbolic representation of the Muslim community. Protecting women from change and assimilation were tantamount to closing the community to the West. In her book, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*, Haideh Moghissi argues that by making the Muslim woman and her rights central to the colonial agenda, it reduced Muslim identity to Muslim men's control of their women. Thus, she challenges "hiding women from the Western gaze, and guarding women's bodies and their minds from changes produced by foreign intervention, came to symbolize protection of Islamic identity, communal dignity and social and cultural continuity" (1999, 35). Here, I refer to Partha Chatterjee's analysis of Indian women and Indian national culture to illuminate the above distinction. An ideological dichotomy is carved into the social space, to what Chatterjee refers to as "outer and inner" (1993, 120). The inner/outer is reflected in "*ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world."

The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. The world is typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world- and woman is its representation. (120)

Women are expected to protect and nurture the spiritual essence of the national culture to preserve the religio-cultural identity in question.

They must not lose their essentially spiritual (that is, feminine) virtues; they must not, in other words, become essentially Westernized. The essential distinction between the social roles of men and women in terms of material and spiritual virtues must at all times be maintained. There would have to be a marked difference in the degree and manner of Westernization of women, as distinct from men, in the modern world (126).

The home/world, spiritual/material, feminine/masculine dichotomies are firmly established through the strict control of the woman's dress, education and her roles inside and outside the home.

Both colonial narrative and counternarrative revive the debate about notions of cultural authenticity, gender politics and boundary markers between the West and the Muslim world. This is further complicated in the diaspora where both sets of ideas compete simultaneously; "Muslim woman"¹⁴ being both a symbol of inferiority and superiority of national religion and culture. In my research, I look for ways to champion religious and cultural reform, and negotiate economic and social advancement for women within this diasporic space mired with questions of cultural authenticity. Historically, there has been a gulf between feminism/Western models of

¹⁴ Resisting "Muslim woman" as a fixed category, I make similar claims as Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon (2005). I, too, believe "Muslim woman" is a discursive invention whom occupies an in-between space; a space where the self is produced and situated through the complex interplay of multiple gendered ideologies: "Orientalist, Islamic feminist, and nationalistic discourses" (2). For the purpose of this research, "Muslim woman" incorporates a specific religious and cultural self-identification.

liberation and traditional notions of cultural authenticity.¹⁵ Inspired by Dominic Thomas's work, I, too, look to understand better how majority and minority populations are "transformed by and in diasporic, multicultural and transnational spaces through the constitutive dimension of cross-cultural encounters" (Thomas 2007, 3). By considering the diaspora and its function in negotiating, cultivating and disciplining tradition and piety for women in a South Asian Muslim community, I explore ways to advocate for gender reform in a space where battles are being waged-- internal battles of religious authority and external battles against a Western narrative that marks Muslim communities as inferior and backward.

SITUATING THE STUDY: BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND—IMMIGRATION POLICY, ISLAMOPHOBIA, AND WOMEN

In examining my research questions, I focused on Birmingham, where the largest concentrations of Muslims in Britain reside.¹⁶ More specifically, my project centers on the inner city of Birmingham, a city noted for its large Pakistani-Muslim immigrant population.¹⁷ This population provides a unique perspective in that it reflects a site of unfolding political and social tension between being both British and Muslim. The Pakistani-Muslim religio-culture in British cities is, for example, perceived to be emblematic of the failure to integrate, and perceived to be

¹⁵ Sondra Hale underscores this point in "Activating the Gender Local: Transnational Ideologies and "Women's Culture" in Northern Sudan." Hale describes the "Sudanese Women's Union" as trying to "position women to be guardians of morality". Her interview with Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim reveals the SWU's philosophy: We do not consider men our enemies. We do not consider Islam our opponent. We refuse to accept the Western model of liberation as our blueprint, nor do we recommend copying men's behavior as a means for reaching emancipation and equality...We conveyed our belief that women's rights must be seen within the context of the welfare of the family and the community and must be sought on the basis of our sociocultural roots (2005, 33).

¹⁶ According to the 2001 census, there are 1.6 million Muslims in Britain (Modood 2005, 151). Measured against the greater British population, they have the highest rates of unemployment, the lowest number of educational qualifications, engage in low-manual work and live in overcrowded, depleted housing.

¹⁷ The majority of Muslim migrant settlers in Birmingham came from rural areas in Pakistan: Cambellpur in West Punjab, and Mirpur districts in Kashmir.

progressing toward physical and social segregation. Positioned as either “insiders” or “outsiders,” configured as “Others,” the members of this community are burdened by their unease with secularism and with growing religiosity, radicalism and ghettoization.

To situate the women in my research, it is intellectually necessary to historicize both the story of migration and identity politics that play out on the social, political and economic British landscape. Of South Asian heritage (Pakistan, India and Bangladesh), Muslims in Britain are characterized as “a semi-industrialized, newly urbanized working class community that is only one generation away from rural peasantry” (Modood 1990, 145). While the earliest arrival of South Asian immigrants dates back to about the 1600’s,¹⁸ the immigration stories of my subjects mostly date back to the decolonization period after the Second World War, when citizens of the British Commonwealth had an unrestricted right of entry into Britain. In need of a workforce, the state provided economic incentives to recruit immigrants to the industrial sector.¹⁹ As a result, throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s, under the 1948 Nationality Act, there was an influx of South Asian Muslims, who “tended to be subsumed under the general heading of ‘colored immigrant’” (Nielsen 2004, 40). These former subjects of the British Empire inherited the rights and privileges of full British citizenship. Historians describe it as “chain migration,” characterized by a two-phase pattern. The first large-scale Muslim immigration began in the 1950’s, comprising of unskilled male workers, mostly in their early 20’s, with rural or farming backgrounds. Steven Vertovec recounts:

The first ‘pioneer’ immigrants found jobs and accommodation in some industrial towns, with subsequent immigrants called over to join them. In this way, settlement of persons, from the same family, village, or district became established in a single

¹⁸ For a detailed history of South Asian migration, see *A South-Asian History of Britain: Four Centuries of Peoples from the Indian Sub-Continent* (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007).

¹⁹ Settlers in Birmingham (West Midlands) worked in “metal bashing foundries and hosiery industries.”

neighborhood of a British city. Concentrations of immigrants from specific parts of South Asia thus grew in specific parts of Britain (Vertovec 2002, 20).

In 1962 and later in 1968, as a response to the growing “public debate over the desirability of larger-scale immigration of ‘coloreds’” (Nielsen 2004, 40), the state passed the Commonwealth Immigration Control Act, which proposed to tighten citizenship laws and limit the right to automatic entry for Commonwealth citizens. To circumvent the restrictive resettlement legislation, there was an increase in family reunification: the migration of wives and children.

The British response to immigration was an increasing fear of the unassimilability of the minority population, who did not share a “British” national culture. For example, Enoch Powell, a Conservative MP, proffered a number of statements, including his famous “Rivers of Blood” speech²⁰ that reinforced a racialized construction of Britishness. To Powell, immigrants:

represented a threat; a body of people alien and antithetical to the interests of the dominant society, individuals and groups, lacking inherent cultural qualities and the desire to integrate with indigenous society and polity (Abbas 2005, 154).

Moreover, he described immigrants as “invading hordes” and spoke of the “terrified white working-class family reduced to racial minority in their own street” (Favell 2001, 105). Powell foresaw an inherent danger in allowing a multi-racial society and thus called for the “end of non-white immigration” and “for subsidizing the repatriation of immigrants from New Commonwealth states” (Fetzer, and Soper 2005, 28). Although the Conservatives expelled Powell, his position on race and immigration was not unique, and in fact, did reflect larger national xenophobic concerns.

²⁰ Enoch Powell delivered his “Rivers of Blood” speech to the Conservative Association Meeting in Birmingham on April 20, 1968. A full text of the speech can be found online at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>>

In the early 1970's, state questions of "how to reconcile conflicting cultural values peacefully," while at the same time "respecting diversity and building social cohesion" (Seaford 2001, 109) materialized in theory and policy debate. As early as 1966, in fact, the government started to repudiate assimilation as a policy. Roy Jenkins, Home Secretary in the Labor government, acknowledged the multicultural reality of the United Kingdom, and believed assimilation could erase cultural diversity. He insisted that the government did not seek "a flattening process of uniformity, but cultural diversity, coupled with equal opportunity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance" (Lewis 2002, 3). There was an affirmation of pluralism and its necessity in a multi-racial Britain, where "ethnic minority groups could be free within the democratic framework to maintain those elements which they themselves consider to be the most essential to their sense of ethnic identity" (Favell 2001, 129).). Correspondingly, the 1970's marked the emergence of multiculturalism, a critique against cultural assimilation.

Multiculturalism was best understood as an active state policy, grounded in ideas of "individual equality and democratic citizenship" (Modood 2008, 15) that recognized the polity as plural. It meant a re-imagining of Britishness, so "citizenship is not a monistic identity that is completely apart from or transcends other identities important to citizens," (Modood 2008, 15) and instead, "all could be part of [the state] without having to deny or privatize other identities" (Modood 2005, 18). Tahir Abbas summarizes Bhikhu Parekh's three tenets of the multicultural model:

First, humans are culturally embedded, that is, they exist in a culturally-structured world and organize their social relations in a culturally-derived system of meaning and significance. Second, different cultures represent different systems of meaning and visions of the good life. Third, every culture is internally plural and reflects a continuing conversation between traditions and strands of thought (Abbas 2005, 155).

Multiculturalism rested on the idea of a decentralized political community that embraced new forms of identity politics. It extended beyond the recognition of “collective cultural differences” to the “need to guarantee politically the survival of the cultural communities bearing these differences” (Cagler 1997, 179). One had the right to be different with equal access to the public domain.

In this effort to maintain a policy of multiculturalism, the British government recognized the need to legislate race-relations law to ensure equal treatment of its citizens. As a result, the state implemented anti-discrimination law and policies. The Race Relations Act of 1968 and 1976, for example, institutionalized the imperative for ethnic and racial minority identities to receive state support. It interdicted direct discrimination in employment or other public sites. It later extended the legislation to consider indirect discrimination, “where cases could also be brought against organizations which unintentionally used discriminatory grounds, or impersonal ones which in practice had a discriminatory effect” (Favell 2001, 107). These laws and policies, however, were shaped by the state’s perception of difference; the laws assumed only race and ethnicity could be grounds of discrimination. Thus, only those cultural differences recognized within the multicultural discourse were “publicly endowed and given rights” (Cagler 1997, 179). State legislation thereby failed to adopt complex categories of identity and ostensibly, endorsed only partial dimensions of personhood.

One outcome of this narrow understanding was that policymakers embedded a concept of racial dualism into race relation law. Through the construction of racially constituted categories, the British population was divided into two polar groups, black and white. Modood reports:

The non-white presence in Britain was conceived of in terms of a double contrast. The first, a contrast between white/European/British and “colored”/black/non-European, was a distinction based on skin color. A further subdivision of the

‘colored’ group in to Asians and West Indians was also essential to the identification and definition of racial groups and constituted the second dualism (Modood 2005, 29).

‘Black’ intended to include all potential victims of color racism. The intention was to “fix difference between belongingness and otherness” (Solomos 2003, 185). However, as the state anchored difference to skin color, race accordingly became the site for resistance strategies for minorities to challenge the structural inequalities within British institutions that furthered their discrimination.

While the development of the British, ‘black’ oppositional identity movement was propitious in shifting the terms of debate from assimilation to the accommodation of immigrants, “black” identity was confused with the development of a “black ethnic pride (African roots) and triggered off other ethnic assertions, Asian, Muslim” (Modood 2005, 158). There was tension between the two versions of ‘blackness’: “political solidarity of all non-whites and a black diasporic African ethnicity” (Modood 2005, 32-33). This “black consciousness” excluded Asians and other victims of racism who did not envision their primary identity in British society in terms of color. At this time, activists saw a need to pluralize the concept of political ‘blackness.’ Asians, while racially subordinated, in particular, did not delimit themselves within a plural racial self. They suffered from a “double disadvantage:” membership in both racial and cultural minority groups. Modood highlights the point of contention: “The objects of racism, ethnic groups, are human subjects with pre-racialized historical and cultural collective identities that cannot be defined by race or racism” (2005, 55). South Asians, for example, he continues, “who experience racial discrimination are reduced to discriminated beings (blacks) that happen to be Asian” (2005, 105). By the late 1980’s, Asians, defying the state naturalization of race, started to emphasize a more intrinsic ethnic or religious identity in contradistinction to the all-

encompassing non-whiteness. The multicultural climate facilitated the encouragement of people to define themselves in terms of cultural authenticity and difference. They deposed the borrowed identity of blackness and instead, assumed multifarious ethnic identities – Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi.

In representing identity, as a matter of race, ethnicity or national origin, the antiracist movement failed to address an equally important constituent of self-perception, namely religion. For Muslims, religion was central to their identity. However, there was little attempt by the state to incorporate religion in race perspectives either as a minority's self-referential articulation of identity or as a means to mobilize collective minority interests. There is political power in being named. So while "Asian" was an expanded codified category of identification, Muslims, in contrast, were not recognized as an ethnically definable community deserving legal protection, racial or religious.

A telling example of the inconsistencies in the state legislation is the House of Lords judgment in the legal case of *Mandla v Dowell Lee* (1983), involving the incident of a Sikh boy who was refused a place at school because of his insistence on wearing a turban. The case was brought in front of the courts to debate the question whether Sikhs could be considered an ethnic group under the Race Relations Act. In a detailed judgment, the House of Lords allowed "Sikh males to wear turbans in school and work regardless of the rules of the school or employers" (Modood 2005, 108). The ruling stated that 'ethnic' should be construed widely in a broad cultural and historic sense. Accordingly, they set out certain criteria and characteristics which the court said had to be taken into account when determining whether a particular group formed an 'ethnic group.' Seddon, Hussain and Malik summarize the characteristics as stated in the ruling:

Groups should have a long shared history, of which the group was conscious and which distinguished it from other groups; The

group must have a cultural tradition of its own, including family and social customs; The group must have a common geographical origin or common ancestors; The must have common literature; The group must have a common religion different from that of neighboring groups; and the groups shares a characteristic of being a minority (Seddon, et al 2004, 51).

In deciding the matter, the Lords found that Sikhs were a distinct racial group, and therefore, were afforded all the protections of the Act. In considering the matter, the Lords commented that Jewish people also met the conditions, and therefore, were also a mono-ethnic group. The anomaly is:

A black Falasha Jew from Ethiopia, a white Ashkenazi Jew from Russia and a brown Sephardic Jew from Lebanon are all treated as belonging to the same ethnic race for the purposes of English law (Seddon, et al 2004, 53).

Muslims, on the other hand, enjoyed no protection against discrimination and incitement to hatred. The legislation was inadequate to recognize the civil interests of Muslims. For example, in *Tariq v. Young & Others*, the tribunal held that Muslims are defined by their religion and not by their race, nationality and/or ethnic group (Seddon, et al 2004). This finding signaled the failure of the Race Relations Act as it did not provide provisions for discrimination against religious identity. In another compelling case, *Safouane & Bouterfas v Joseph Ltd & Hannah*, two Muslim employees were dismissed for performing prayers during their lunch and afternoon breaks. Prior to their dismissal, they had been subjected additionally to a series of abusive acts, including having other employees urinate on their prayer mats. Again, the applicants could not, however, argue direct racial discrimination as the treatment was related to their religious beliefs rather than their ethnic origin (Seddon, et al 2004). Given that Islam is not immured to a singular 'ethnic' group, Muslims as a religious group could not and cannot benefit from protection or equality provisions, unless it can be shown that the discrimination was racial or because they are

from a particular ethnic group, “Bangladeshi” or “Pakistani.” The Law Lords “found it impossible to attribute a clearly defined ‘racial flavor’ to such an ethnically cosmopolitan religion as Islam” (Favell 2001, 218). This is a significant exclusion as it “weakens the rights of Muslims in employment, housing, and affords no protection against offensive literature” (Modood 2005, 114). In discrimination terms, the Race Relations Act²¹ is the only vehicle available for Muslims to pursue legal recourse. Therefore, by coming up against the legal limits of multicultural policies, it reinforces in Muslim minds, their distinct ‘otherness’ from other minority groups.

Consequently, as the notion of political ‘blackness’ was becoming normative, British Muslims were increasingly disenchanted with public discourse about minorities, which implicated them as part and parcel of an abstract ‘Asian’ community. The first public expression of this disaffection with the state was what is now known as the “Rushdie Affair.” The battle over Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988) accorded Muslims an opportunity to confront their minority status and construct an imagined sense of community – a community they believed to be invisible to the British public mind. In October 1988, Muslim organizations in Britain were informed of the contents of the book, which in fictional form, ridiculed the revered Prophet Muhammad, his wives and his companions. The UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA) formed to take up the campaign. Their objections centered on three concerns: The book insulted Muslim sensibilities; it was suffused with historical inaccuracies; and it reinforced stereotypes about Muslims. Their initial demands included the book be opened with a note “disclaiming its historical credentials” (Parekh 2000, 299). British Muslims demanded the state

²¹ In December 2003, Muslims are further provided protection in employment on the grounds of religious discrimination, under the domestic adoption of a European Union directive of “non-discrimination in employment on the grounds of religion or belief,” conceived in article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam (Meer and Modood 2009), 483.

to ban and withdraw the book from public libraries. However, it soon became apparent that Muslims did not have the power, or the intellectual resources to make a telling political intervention—a transparent barometer of excluded status. Disillusioned with British establishment, the Bradford Council of Mosques orchestrated a staged book burning as a media event. This was followed by public mass demonstrations against the book. Contrary to public opinion, the furor over *The Satanic Verses* did not exemplify the Muslim minority's move into fundamentalism, but rather, it was an ill-fated attempt by the Muslim minority to champion the inclusion of other faiths in the current blasphemy laws (only applicable to the Anglican church), and to extend race discrimination laws to include religion as a category of discrimination (only applicable to Northern Ireland). British Muslims intended the protests to be a strategy of resistance in the public domain of a perceived shared political culture, but their efforts failed because the state saw the Muslim community's demands as an affront to the democratic principle of free speech.

The “Rushdie Affair” was a significant turning point in shaping popular imagination and national policy debates on multiculturalism and antiracism. It had a three-fold effect: first, the affair reinforced public perception that Muslim minorities did not share the dominant values of British society and posed a threat to social cohesion. The state conceptualized the issue as “one of conflict between freedom and fundamentalism” (Parekh 2000, 303), and represented Muslims as a ‘fifth column’ that undermined democratic principles. For example, in response to the events, John Patten, Minister of State at the Home Office, argued:

If Muslims are to make most of their lives and opportunities as British citizens, then they must have a clear understanding of the British democratic processes, of its laws, the system of government and the history that lies behind them, and indeed of their own rights and responsibilities (The Times, 5 July 1989, quoted in Solomos 2003, 214)

Second, for Muslims, whose demands for redress were largely disregarded, it served to alienate further the Muslim population from the British polity. British Muslims now recognized deep inequalities of political power and saw limitations to their citizenship. They believed, rightly so or not, the state did not support their religious interests. The third outcome emerged from this perception, where this “discrimination” provided the impetus to strengthen community and religious organizations. Modood elucidates:

For Muslims, it generated an impassioned activism and mobilization that no previous campaign against racism could stir. Many lapsed or passive Muslims rediscovered new community solidarity. What is striking was that when the public rage against Muslims was at its most intense, Muslims neither sought nor were offered any special solidarity by any non-white minority (2005, 157).

Local political activists were adopting a high profile, mobilizing Muslims as a political constituency to articulate their shared concerns about the marginalization on the national front. In 1990, for example, Kalim Siddiqui drafted the “Muslim Manifesto.” The objective was to “establish a body that can speak with authority on behalf of Muslims and operates like a Parliament.” This “Muslim Parliament,” he continued, “was to consolidate the Muslim population in Britain into an organized community in pursuit of goals set by Islam” (Kepel 2004, 143). The Muslim Parliament opened session on January 4, 1992. The larger goal of the parliament was to discourage assimilation of Muslims into British culture.

The Runnymede Report explicates further this social reality of British Muslims. In 1997, a race-relations think-tank, The Runnymede Trust, published a report entitled “Islamophobia – A Challenge for Us All.” It coined the term ‘Islamophobia’ (similar to anti-Semitism or xenophobia) to describe the nature and the extent of anti-Muslim prejudice in Britain. The report identified Muslims mostly as being of non-European descent (non-white), and therefore the

targets of cultural and religious racism as a result of an anti-Islamic bias. The report claimed this anti-Islamic bias underscored public debate about Muslims, which in turn, “fostered discrimination in employment and schooling, hate crimes, and mischaracterization in the media” (Klausen 2005, 57). In his writing, Tahir Abbas lists the seven features of ‘Islamophobia:’

Muslim cultures are seen as monolithic; Islamic cultures are substantially different from other cultures; Islam is perceived as implacably threatening; Islam’s adherents use of their faith to political and military advantage; Muslims’ criticism of Western cultures and societies is rejected out of hand; the fear of Islam is mixed with racist hostility to immigration; and Islamophobia is assumed to be natural and unproblematic (2005, 12).

The report concluded that: “Muslims experienced significant hostility in Britain and recommended amending the 1976 Race Relations Act to make discrimination unlawful on religious grounds” (Fetzter 2005, 32). Undeniably, ‘Islamophobia’ is the contributing factor in furthering the social segregation of the Muslim community.

In the late 1990’s, perceiving a sense of separateness from the state who, British Muslims believed, selected only manifestations of difference the state took to be significant, British Muslims started to move towards the “communitarian”⁹ or ghettoization of their community. By way of explaining this isolationist frame of mind, the notion of economic and cultural exclusion dominates the discourse. Economically, South Asian Muslims are at the lowest end of the scale. They suffer high unemployment as a result of factory closures and the ‘mill towns’ they reside in receive little government funding for social advancement. It follows then:

Individuals look for a collective identity that enables them to negotiate and improve their position. Islam provides a vector for protest against the social conditions that structure individual lives (Akhtar 2005, 167)

⁹ The communitarian approach is to seek redress for the imbalance “by shifting citizenship back into civil society and community rather than in the market or the state (Seddon, et al 2004, 164).

In terms of cultural exclusion, it is the vilification of Muslims as backward and anti-modern that results in a turn to religion; a religion that actively resists “the symbolic exclusion of minority Muslims in the West” (Akhtar 2005, 168). Crystallized around Islam, the construction of a familial ethno-religio community identity is a reactionary response against anti-Muslim racism.

Parveen Akhtar (2005) elaborates:

The popularity of politicized Islam does not imply a strict adherence to the religion’s practices and rituals, precisely because what is important is not spiritual or moral guidance. Instead, what attracts is the idea of resisting the dominant, negative hegemony. Islam provides the vehicle for political mobilization in relation to economic exclusion, and group solidarity in connection to social exclusion. In neither case does the turn to religion have to be accompanied by an acceptance of actual religious practice (169).

With this heightened sense of difference, the demands for separate Muslim space increased: separate schools, prayer facilities, and community centers. The impulse was to create parallel philosophical and territorial borders marked by language, religion, tradition, education, and employment, as a form of resistance. Given the empirical reality of a multicultural society, the British government was amenable to the Muslim community on a number of appeals. The public accommodation of Muslim needs and concerns have included:

permission to establish facilities for ritual slaughtering of animals for food; to set aside areas of local cemeteries for Muslim use; to provide halal (permitted) meat in public institutions such as schools, hospitals, and prisons; to designate prayer facilities or time for prayer in the workplace and to allow time off for religious festivals; and to broadcast public azan or call to prayer from mosques over loudspeakers (Vertovec 2002, 28).

Ironically, this accommodation of the state served only to facilitate the retreat of Muslims into their communities. They tended to accept this self-imposed isolation as these constructed ethnic and religious enclaves reinforced a sense of community previously unavailable to them. An Islamic identity was central to the process of community formation. The process followed

largely segregated residential patterns, where communities turned inwards based on an ethnic identity linked to Islam. It required disassociation from the dominant British culture. Philip

Lewis explains:

A parallel economic infrastructure and self-sufficient religious and cultural world had been created; there had emerged a dual society, physically separate, looking outward to mainstream British society in certain respects (jobs, welfare services, and education) and inward to preserve its religious and cultural values (1997, 129).

In the articulation of this ethnic and religious homogenization of neighborhoods, a set of values and beliefs were developed further to complement their South-Asian Muslim identity: values that assumed moral superiority over the West. Engineered in opposition to the western meta-narrative that perceives Islam as a threat to indigenous British culture, the Asian-Muslim belief system re-appropriated the binary of Islam and the West. To resist imposed definitions by the West, Muslims sought to reclaim their maligned identities. Positioning themselves within a polarized negative-positive framework, the Muslim minority associated positive with Islam and ‘believers’ while they associated the negative with ‘infidels.’ In this framework, South-Asian Muslims transposed misrepresented ideas about British society; the narrative suggested that the UK encouraged immorality, and Muslim interaction in non-Muslim space, therefore, should invite caution. There was “more social pressure to respect traditional values (such as chastity and the seclusion of women), an increase in endogamy and arranged marriages with a spouse from the village or origin, and more respect for collective celebrations” (Roy 2004, 139). Resulting from this effort was the formation of an insular community committed to the preservation of its religion and culture.

At this juncture, the state started to ask how to manage Muslims in public space. The state wanted to reconcile the principles of multiculturalism with the increasing need to integrate

Muslims in the British collective. Multiculturalism is paradoxical in that it celebrates diversity, but it is also threatened by difference in the public sphere. How to combine “a mono-cultural public realm with a multicultural private realm” (Parekh 2000, 204)? The policies rely on a strict division between the public and private spheres. Thus, while the state allows minorities to preserve their own traditions, it asks them to accept the political culture of the ‘host’ state and restrict their expression of cultural and religious difference to the private. For Muslims, however, equality included “the public recognition of their private communal identities (Modood 2005, 131). The state, nevertheless, rejected the notion of a shared culture in the public sphere. Instead, some members of the state called for immigrants to adhere to an assimilationist mode of political and social integration.

Nationalists advocated assimilation rhetoric as a way to counteract the failure of dogmatic multicultural policies. Assimilation policy was a way to rebuild a fractured British national identity. The site of struggle was that “no polity can be stable and cohesive unless its members share national culture, including common values, ideals of excellence, moral beliefs and social practices” (Parekh 2000, 197). Assimilationists argued by upholding its minorities’ cultural and religious customs and traditions, the state impeded the formation of a cohesive British identity. Leo McKinstry, in a scathing article, “Dis-United Kingdom; Multiculturalism isn’t Working” (2005), criticizes British public services for indirectly endorsing racial segregation. The duty to promote cultural diversity, in his opinion, has fragmented a “shared sense of national belonging.” Local councils and hospitals are required to print public documents in ethnic minority languages, the BBC provides news in “Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi and Gujarati” in the UK, and housing associations cater to ethnic minorities. For instance, “the Aashyana in Bristol provides special apartments for Muslims with the toilets facing away from

Mecca” (McKinstry). To accentuate his point further, he quotes Kenan Malik, an Asian writer: “The problem is not that ethnic minorities are alienated from a concept of Britishness, but that there is today no source of Britishness from which anyone-black or white-can draw inspiration” (McKinstry). The solution for McKinstry and others is the wholesale adoption of assimilation. In their view, the choice before minorities is straightforward:

If they wish to become part of society and be treated like the rest of their fellow-citizens, they should assimilate. If they insist on retaining their separate cultures, they should not complain if they are viewed as outsiders and subjected to discriminatory treatment (Parekh 2000, 197).

Assimilationists believe there should be no state public recognition of a citizen’s private identity.

Home Secretary David Blunkett heeded the call for assimilation. He presented the government White Paper on immigration to Parliament. Entitled “Safe Borders, Safe Haven,” the report emphasized “the need for the Asian community to ‘integrate,’ to adopt British ‘norms of acceptability’ and look for spouses for their children from within the ‘settled’ Asian community in Britain – and not overseas.” Further, Blunkett proposed that “new immigrants should pass tests in English and British citizenship, swear allegiance to the crown in public ceremonies, and that religious leaders be recruited from among those who have studied in Britain (and know English)” (Werbner 2002, 3). What seemed notable was his selective indictment of one community. He ascribed blame to South-Asian Muslims. After all, the African-Caribbean and Indian communities were acknowledged publicly as assimilable. In contrast, Blunkett regards Islamic radicalism, and the ‘uncivilized’ customs and beliefs of Muslims a cause of furthering Muslims’ sense of alienation. This is also evidenced by the “Community Cohesion Review Team (CCRT) Report” which surveyed the towns of Bradford, Oldham and Burnley after the race riots in 2001, involving young South Asian men. The report identified their ‘difference’ as the

underlying cause of the riots. The official reports focused on “segregation and social cohesion within a discourse that constructed the segregated community as the ‘problem’” (Bagguley 2005, 210). The following factors were listed as being particularly problematic:

Separate: educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operated on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges (Home Office, 2001a:para. 2.1, quoted in McGhee 2005, 48).

The report’s conclusions reduced the riots to a moment of failed integration, where the Muslim men had not yet integrated within the ‘host’ community. The uncritical fixation on social cohesion prompted initiatives aimed at encouraging social inclusion. For example, while there had been previous state funding for religious schools, the British government started to reevaluate their position. The state believed that such schools were “nurseries of reactionary ideas,” (Parekh 2000, 254) and led to further ghettoization of communities. As a result, in May 2004, an Islamic high school in Oxford was refused State assistance due to the fear of encouraging separatism between cultures and religions (Cesari 2004, 73). Following is the Muslim response to this state interference:

The government has been telling us that we are citizens of this country, that we have equal rights. But when ask for equal rights, for our own schools like other faiths have their own schools, the government tells us that they will be divisive and that they will create a ghetto mentality. It is Islam that has been ghettoized by the Establishment – K.S. Butt (2001), Chair of the Islamic Resource Centre, Birmingham. (Quoted in Fetzer 2005, 1)

In fact, South Asian Muslim community members accuse the CCRT report of overlooking, in their investigation, the role the British National Party (BNP) played in the riots. The South-Asian community, instead, attributed the outbreak of violence to the neo-fascist

rhetoric of the BNP. Founded by John Tyndall in 1982, the BNP champions a nationalist ideology based on racial purity and anti-immigration. It particularly roused the spirit of 'Islamophobia.' Some of its publications include:

Islam Out of Britain', 'Islam a Threat to Us All' and 'The Truth about Islam'. And on the BNP website: "The Enemy Within", "The Real Face of Islam", 'The Choice: Islam or the West?' and 'What if Islam Ruled Britain.' In one of these pamphlets, 'The truth about Islam', BNP set out a range of highly inflammatory reasons for hating Islam, for example: to find out what Islam really stands for, all you have to do is look at a copy of the Koran, and see for yourself...Islam really does stand for intolerance, slaughter, looting, arson and the molestation of women" (Quoted in McGhee 2005, 104).

For Muslims, this was yet another measure to subordinate them as a minority group. The Muslim community still remained unprotected by legislation that prohibited the incitement to religious hatred and moreover, the far Right was exploiting the lack of this legislation. The riots, thus, could be concluded, as an explosive reaction to the young community members' discontent.

This is not to say, however, that members of the South-Asian Muslim community constitute a homogenous group. There is a pool of literature that describes the hybrid nature of Muslim/Asian/British identity. As these multiple identities shift, no singular definition emerges within this diasporic space. Second and third generation British South-Asian Muslims, in particular, confront competing discourses. For some members, the answer lies with secularism. For others, permutations of Islam have become a cultural resource in the design of a Muslim identity. Some rely on the notion of the *ummah* – the global community of Islam, which transcends any claims to a national identity. By doing so, they abandon the national as a discursive political arena. These second-generation Muslims conceive the nation-state:

as operating through an exclusionary process which not only denies them access to citizenship but also fails to acknowledge emerging new identities: on the one hand by persisting in

crystallizing Muslims as permanent and essential ‘others’ and on the other by offering them assimilation to the national community through a logic which restricts Muslim politics and identities to a minority standpoint (Salih 2004, 3).

This new sense of being ‘Muslim’ has served to displace the local/ethnic forms of religious expressions of their parents that have traditionally reconstituted within the West. There has been competition between Islamic organizations (Muslim Council of Britain, *Tablighi Jama’at*, *Ali Hadith, Jamaa’at Islami*) vying for representative authority within the British Muslim consciousness. For example, the local *ulama* (religious and spiritual leaders) are struggling to deal with the contemporary issues in a foreign social environment, and thus, are imparting to British Muslims, an Islamic tradition mediated through South Asian culture (Lewis, 2002). The Islamist project, on the other hand, is attempting to reinvent an ‘authentic’ Islam invoked as antithetical to the West. For instance, in the early 1990’s, a small number of groups particularly attracted the disaffected. The most notable being *Hizb al-Tahrir* (Party of Liberation) an extremist Islamist group that protested “against in the immorality and imperialism of the West” (Mandaville 2002, 225), and called for “the re-establishment of the Caliphate” (Nielsen, 51). Recently, Hizb al-Tahrir was at the forefront in a legal battle, when they “advised” sixteen-year old female member, Shabina Begum, to challenge the denial of her right to wear a *jilbab* (a long coat) as part of her dress code at school (Klausen, 2005).

Additionally within this diasporic space, encountered with Islam is South Asian popular culture. Second and third generation British Muslims wrestle with two intractable issues: a British ‘Muslim’ identity and a “transnational popular commercial cultural sphere imported from South Asia” (Werbner 2004, 3), which include Hindu and Sikh Indian identities. The appeal of this cultural space is the genuine enjoyment of cuisine, music, literature, television and Bollywood film. Cultural politics are in constant play within these two spheres. From the

perspective of the British imaginary, ‘Asian’ culture is celebrated as it reflects a positive integration. For Muslim puritans, ‘Asian’ popular culture is a source of friction in British Asian-Muslim internal politics. Language and ethnic customs remain an obstacle to the “homogenization of British Islam, despite public invocations of unity” (Werbner 2004, 10). The dilemma for British Muslims is to reconcile the tensions between the two cultural trajectories, which elicit different identifications in the public space. Thus, it is an on-going dialectal process to embrace a self-reflexive identity, whose provenance is outside the hegemonic understandings of either sphere.

British South-Asian Muslims are in an intimate crisis of identity, whereby they are struggling to re-define themselves in a public space, which they believe does not currently recognize nor represent their unique identity. Shama,²² an interviewee and a poet, explains: “I always say that that I was in transition in creation...explains the difficulty of knowing who I am” (Interview 35). Discourses on race and religion are imposed on the Muslim minority, at both the local and national level. As identity is reified in public imagination (‘Black,’ ‘Asian,’ ‘Muslim’) it becomes a fixed, unchanging collective of cultural traits as seen in Rushdie’s claim that ‘immigrant’ is synonymous with “Black immigrant.” The public imbues British Muslims’ identity with over-determined meaning and uncritically sets the terms of debate. Talal Asad posits: “Identity depends on the other’s recognition of the self (2003, 161). What does it mean then if British Muslims lack legal recognition in British politics? Are Muslims in Britain or of Britain? At present, British Muslims are denied an authoritative voice in the public domain. They are economically, socially and culturally marginalized. They are increasingly the targets of

²² Shama is a pseudonym. See Appendix for interview details.

racism and at the same time, outside the writ of current laws and policies. The state, for its part, is searching for a just way to integrate plurality without flattening its democratic principles.

Given this state of politics, British, Muslim women, unsurprisingly, suffer from a double bind: oppression at both internal and external levels. Thus, it is valuable to study this segment of the British Muslim population to witness the possible ways Muslim women are negotiating a balance between both worlds. While generalized third-person notions of Muslim women as sites of oppression have been advanced, British Muslim women have yet to be the center of their own stories. While there has been substantial focus on the condition and psyche of the Muslim male, I offer the perspective of its female counterpart. I will not engage, however, with the paradigmatic discourse on Muslim women (read: veiling) that dominates Western public imagination. Instead, I unveil her vision of a just, integrated society that includes herself at the religio-ethnic and national strata.

METHODOLOGY:

My project began with a thorough perusal of academic writings, not only the works discussed above—emanating from feminist, Islamic, and postcolonial thought, but also including works on British colonial policy and the history of South Asian Muslims in Britain and Birmingham.

My central method, however, was to carry out interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, including participant observation, conducted in Birmingham, England, from June 2007-July 2008, and in January 2010. My research accords weight to the shift in identity among Muslim women to accommodate the redefinition of Muslim male identity. In this work, I consider what informs this shift. I utilize two methods of data acquisition. First, I conducted over seventy informal participatory interviews with adult (eighteen and older) Muslim South Asian women in

the community. I explore how political, economic, religious and cultural life is organized in this particular concentrated location of British Muslims. By acquiring first-hand accounts of the ways in which a hybrid of culture and Islam in its localized form operates on the ground and interacts with everyday life, I identify the economic, political and cultural disparities between Muslim men and women, and additionally, the barriers that deny or restrict integration into larger British society. For example, I look to the responses, if any, of my collaborators to the question of how members in their community limit or advance young girls' access to education. Second, I examine print and television media in order to demonstrate that there is a disarticulation between how Muslim women self-identify, and how they are represented in the media. By analyzing the images of Muslim women that circulate in public space, I explore how modes of representations can renew tensions between Muslims and the West and further the ethnic and religious homogenization within the British Muslim imagination. A negative media focus on wearing *niqab* (face veil) for example, may only serve to bolster its use among more Muslim women in the community.

I met most women in my study in public spaces: community centers, malls, coffee shops and schools. The interviews were structured informally and organized loosely around four categories of inquiry. The first was a sociological profile, which included questions on personal demographics: age, educational or professional background, and family immigration history. The second was citizenship. For example, "What does it mean to be "British?" The purpose was to investigate their feelings of belonging to a religious, ethnic and national community. The third area of inquiry was religion. Here, I probed into how Islam factors into their every-day lives. For example, what is their level of religious observance? Do they find gendered difference in terms of practice of religion? If so, what, why and how do they respond to such differences? The last

area of inquiry was what I defined as cultural and social rules for women. I asked further questions about education, levels of acculturation, mobility, family structures, rules of conduct inside and outside the family and forces of exclusion. I used the above framework as a general guideline, and I let our open-ended conversations decide the course of the interview. The goal for me was to stitch the multiple life stories into what I saw as a definable general pattern of gendered behavior and response within this community under study. Accordingly, emerging from this research are three sites of data analysis that illuminate the questions I ask. I contextualize questions of Muslim female agency, and notions of citizenship and hope to have obtained a better understanding of how religion can regulate public and private lives for both women and men in secular space.

ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS:

In addition to this introductory chapter and a concluding chapter, I have organized my research into three substantive chapters. In each chapter, I respond to at least one of my research questions: How is Islamic identity asserted away from the “homeland,” and moreover, what are the larger consequences of these assertions to women? What are the mechanisms whereby Muslim women construct, challenge, contest, collaborate in, and negotiate religio-cultural readings of Islam?

First, in Chapter 2, “The Deployment of Muslim Women-Only Spaces in the British Landscape,” I explore the ways Muslim women navigate the vicissitudes of social ghettoization. I analyze how physical sites are constructed, coded, and maintained, what they represent and how they enhance Muslim identity.²³ Of importance to me is what community members mark as

²³ I rely on Jessica Jacobson’s understanding of social boundary processes: A social boundary “does not simply happen as a reaction of one’s system to another. It also reflects the traffic of symbolic meanings occurring within each of these systems or groups, in which the impact of external factors is refracted

inside (pure sacred space of religion and culture) or outside. And further, to what space do women have access and why? Based on research data, in this second chapter I discuss the cultural constraints limiting my collaborators. Following I examine the construction and utilization of women-only spaces. Finding that British Muslim women are actively engineering gendered spaces to circumvent dogmatic traditions that stress strict segregation of the sexes, while at the same time permitting access to public space, I ask whether alternative Muslim women-only spaces encourage the empowerment of British Muslim women or instead further marginalize them from the British secular mainstream. The last point of analysis in this chapter focuses on how Islam provides a theological language to communicate and advocate for gender reform. I offer insight into how Islamic feminism in the diaspora lends itself to questioning traditional patriarchal authority and, as a result, extends Muslim women's access to public space. Shored up by religion, Muslim South Asian women are pressing for the right to participate in British civic life: economics, politics and most significantly, education.

The third chapter, "The (Re)presentation of the Female Muslim Self in British Knowledge Production," explores how British Muslim women are addressing the disarticulation between their self-identification and their depiction in the British media. In this chapter, I present my research findings in two parts: First, I argue that the concentrated negative mainstream media portrayal (newspapers, television documentaries, fictional mini-series) of Muslim women impact

through varied experiences of the member (quoted in Jacobson 1998, 16). In essence, identities are reinforced by boundary mechanisms. Jacobson writes: "The boundaries which define the distinctiveness of Muslims guarantee that there exists a certain social distance between the minority religious group and the majority; and also that some sense of solidarity exists within the Muslim community (whether this 'community' is perceived to be a local or nation-wide grouping, or even the entire Muslim umma which transcends both history and nations). Thus individual Muslims are likely to be somewhat insulated from external pressures which might otherwise bring about the gradual erosion or even, ultimately the abandonment of their traditional beliefs and practices." According to Jacobson, "a Muslim is obliged to express his belonging to the Muslim community and detachment from non-Muslim society, in an especially concrete and unequivocal manner" (1998, 127).

the (re)presentation of the Muslim self. I argue that the consequence is an inclination within the South Asian Muslim minority community to remain steadfast in their uncritical acceptance of a traditional narrative, in particular with respect to women. I focus on what Elizabeth Poole refers to as “audience interpretations” (2002, 19), that is, how “social meanings [are] produced in the interaction between text and audience” (188). Most importantly for me is how social meanings acquire significance in the lived experiences of British South Asian Muslim women.

Secondly, in this chapter, I examine the consumption of Muslim-centric communication outlets by British Muslims and ask the same question as in chapter two: Can alternative Muslim knowledge production encourage the empowerment of British Muslim women or instead further marginalize them from the British secular mainstream?

In the fourth chapter, “Fashioning the Muslim Woman: Exploring Dress Reform,” I examine the ways in which religio-cultural dress is a fundamental focus in the self (re)presentation of my target group. Arguing that dress is part of minority discourse, I show how dress has been crucial to the construction of the British South Asian women’s identity. Because women are repositories of religio-cultural tradition, this fourth chapter engages with the gendering of the politics of dress and discusses how these women are utilizing dress as a means of religio-cultural subversion. Using first-hand accounts, I first explore how dress signifies definitive cultural ideas of masculinity/femininity and tradition/modernity. Second, I argue that the “putting on” of the *hijab* (head covering worn in public by Muslim women) or the “taking off” of Asian clothes are unacknowledged, but nevertheless are devices of cultural resistance and for my collaborators, a tool in emancipatory politics. Lastly, to further challenge notions of tradition and modernity, I profile the cases of emerging “Islamic” fashion designers, who reject imposed inferences that “Islamic” dress is oppressive. Their work attempts to traverse

conventional visions of beauty and fashion so as to include their “Islamic” designs as part of “modern” fashion projects.

Chapter Two - The Deployment of Muslim Women-Only Spaces in the British Landscape

The immigrant experience as recounted through oral and written word, for many, chronicle the confrontation with colliding home and host cultures. Characteristic to narratives of border-crossings are stories of displaced roots and the desire to preserve indigenous identities.²⁴ For my collaborators, the traffic of South Asian Muslims to Britain is not only a history of labor migration and family reunification, but also a history of importing religio-cultural values and mores whose provenance rest in the Indian sub-continent. Nostalgia for home brought an unyielding will to rebuild kinship networks, safeguard their religio-cultural traditions, cultivate communal pride, and to reject “westernization” and insulate their families and community from outside influences, i.e. the West. By exploring mapping of space, kinship patterns, and communal interpretations of gendered tradition, this chapter takes up this effort of reconstruction, and seeks to identify what traditional elements or “objects of memory”²⁵ are maintained and/or contested by women in the community under study.

To impose conformity among the immigrant collective, these traveling transnational bodies looked to home for a moral compass and championed a renewed religio-culture in the adopted homeland. This religio-cultural identity, an invention of presumed South Asian authenticity surfaced as a hybrid of Pakistani/Indian/Bangladeshi culture and Islam: a mestizo of cultural and religious norms and traditions fused to create a fettered adaptation of the original. Under the

²⁴ The fictional and non-fictional writings of Leila Ahmed – *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America – A Woman’s Journey* (1999); Hanif Kureishi – *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990); *The Black Album* (1995); Meera Syal – *Anita and Me* (1999); *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (2001); Monica Ali – *Brick Lane* (2004); and the film “East is East” (1999) exemplify such narratives.

²⁵ I situate my analysis in a similar framework as put forward by author Susan Slyomovics, in *The Object of Memory* (1998), where she describes how displaced Palestinians resurrect a “memorializing consciousness...to promote social cohesion for a group’s endangered identity” (4).

catchall of a monolithic identity, both religion and culture at times reside uncomfortably alongside each other, often holding conflicting viewpoints. Rabia²⁶ explains:

From birth, you are always reminded of what your Pakistani culture is and that you are Pakistani and nothing else. For my parents, Pakistani=Muslim. For them, it was the same...when, it really is not the same, there are things that are acceptable there that are not acceptable in Islam (Interview 25).

Presenting culture and religion as indistinguishable allows fewer possibilities for reflection and criticism. Nazneen²⁷ tells me:

There is a pull and push towards Islam and culture...people will say it is Islam when it is actually culture...you are doing it because you have always done it and generations before you have done it (Interview 18).

Mostly among the women I interviewed, religious piety did not extend beyond the minimal basics in their formative years. Faith-centered practice was without regular rigor, this despite a positive identification with Islamic identity and an intellectual understanding of the demands of religious observance.²⁸ Farzana²⁹ points to her grandmother as a “five times reader (of prayers),” while she herself was “moderate, in terms of Islam” (Interview 47). On this issue, Khadija³⁰ explains:

But we were only supposed to be Muslim to a certain degree...hijab was not necessary...even praying five times a day was not that important, it was just that we were Muslim (according to her father)...it was important that we understood Islam but the practice was not a big issue (Interview 24).

²⁶ Rabia is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #25.

²⁷ Nazneen is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #18.

²⁸ The five fundamental covenants of Islam are: 1. *Shahadah* - professing the singularity of God; 2. *Salat* - performance of five daily prayers; 3. *Sawm* - fasting during the month of Ramadan; 4. *Zakat* - practice of charitable giving based on accumulated wealth; 5. *Hajj* - pilgrimage to Mecca.

²⁹ Farzana is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #47.

³⁰ Khadija is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #24.

To the question about the degree of religiosity in their homes, some of the typical responses include:

I was not practicing...I was not praying or covering...my family was not strictly practicing...everything my mum taught me was what she was taught by culture...everything was “we don’t do that here” or “we do this”. We weren’t taught that praying five times was compulsory, it was something you did when you were fifty years old or after Hajj, when you got serious about Islam (Rabia, Interview 25)

My upbringing in Islam has been quite secular...we practiced in the home...pray on the holidays...as far as I understood, I didn’t understand that Islam was a way of life (Rabina,³¹ Interview 12).

My parents were not practicing. We always had *halal* (permissible) food, not *haram* (prohibited). We greeted with *salam* (hello). We had Ramadan...that was it. No five daily prayers. I did not wear hijab (Ravina,³² Interview 8).

Family weren’t particularly practicing – fasted at Ramadan, eat halal meat, parents were not strict about praying five times a day (Sana,³³ Interview 54)

The rituals associated with Islam were de-emphasized, and for the majority, there was an indiscriminate emphasis on culture: it was a “cultural understanding of Islam” (Nadia,³⁴ Interview 3), a “watered-down version” (Samah,³⁵ Interview 6), “not a real Islam” (Saira,³⁶ Interview 49). For Rukhsana³⁷:

“Parents practiced certain aspects of Islam, the rest was all man-made...girl married in red...rooted in Hindu tradition but many thought it was an Islamic thing.

³¹ Rabina is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #12.

³² Ravina is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #8.

³³ Sana is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #54.

³⁴ Nadia is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #3.

³⁵ Samah is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #6.

³⁶ Saira is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #49.

³⁷ Rukhsana is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #63.

There was great confusion as to what was Islam and what was man-made traditions...I grew up in that confusion. When I wanted to cut my hair when I was 13, my mother said “No, no...it is haram, we don’t do that” What she didn’t know that this was a Sikh tradition that they were influenced by back in India” (Interview 63).

Religion and culture, in particular, collide at the local mosques where many parents send their children after school to learn Qu’ran daily for two hours. Although tantamount to a babysitting service, the mosque primarily functions as a conduit to religious education. Most of the *imams* (leading religious authority in the mosque) do not speak English, and the books of instruction are in Urdu. Sana describes:

At the local mosque, imams are from rural Pakistan...we need to get away from the old way of thinking...you can’t apply the norms and values of rural Pakistan 50 yrs ago to modern-day Britain and British-Pakistani Muslims” (Interview 54).

What this means for the community is that there is disconnect between the imams and British-born Muslim children. For example, owing to outmoded cultural prescripts that limit women from attending mosques after puberty, the imams restrict young girls’ access to religious education.

Gendered Reconstruction of “Home”:

Generally among my interviewees a cultural stranglehold persists in Britain despite its distance from the sub-continent: community members divert communal attention away from religion, and nurture cultural dogma. Cultural mores and traditions are neither static nor fixed in social space, but travel across temporal and spatial boundaries.³⁸ To sustain the circulation and appropriation of these religio-cultural ideas, women in turn are entrusted with preserving the ideological essence of this cultural capital in the diaspora. Author Robina Mohammad (2005)

³⁸ See Edward Said’s *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, for the stages “common to the way a theory or idea travels” (1983, 226).

elaborates: “Women are called on to perform the ideal of womanhood that marks the collectivity, which in turn circumscribes their experiences and access to social and economic advancement” (178). For working-class British Pakistani Muslim women, Mohammad argues, this ideology offers an explanation for their economic and social marginalization in Britain. The ideals, she notes, “emphasize women’s place within, and relationship to, the Islamic family, which is perceived within British working-class Pakistani communities to be under threat from Western values” (179). To ensure women conform to this gendered ideal there is an emphasis on self-regulation and community surveillance. Women are perceived as the guardians of collective identity and thus:

women’s bodies are made central to the construction, maintenance, and performance of collective identity...women’s roles as mothers of the collective naturalize their place within the home and family and make marriage discursively and in practice a key marker that shapes the trajectory of their lives (183).

This fixation impacts women’s spatial mobility. The compulsion to protect a subjective sense of “home” disposes women to domestic spaces, and restricts their access to employment and education.

To compel cultural loyalty, community members take upon themselves the task of regulating women’s bodies and movements, conferring on women the role of preserving their distinctiveness and inventing disciplinary measures for those women who attempt to deviate from the norm. There is a cultural belief that the protection of the control of women and female sexuality maintains both familial honor and social order and cultural continuity in the community. In this exercise, its members (men and women) are self-appointed guardians of the moral purity of “their” women. Men calculate their *izzat* (honor) by the behavior of the women in their family rather than by their own. A woman’s *izzat* is linked with her sexuality and intact

virginity. A transgression by a female is tantamount to threatening “the survival of the group and its values or of the individual family within the group” (Jacobson, 1998, 64). My collaborators name honor or lack thereof (izzat and bezzat, respectively) the singular value by which the community measures their desirability. Rania³⁹ explains:

There are limits to being Western, because in Asian culture, we have to follow izzat. The girl carries izzat. To maintain izzat, we can't go out or sleep around. Izzat is very sensitive, it can be broken in a little way (Interview 27).

Honor reveals itself as an animated characteristic of identity, a tenuous characteristic, easy to lose and thus always under scrutiny. A prominent BBC journalist adds to the discussion:

South Asian culture is utterly feudal, even in urban areas...it manifests itself with notions of control, which are to do with women. While there are all kinds of edicts and strictures with religion which make women seem they are second-class citizens, ultimately, it is culture that makes women second-class citizens because the patriarchy is underpinned with controlling women; their bodies and minds.

Culturally, South Asian communities are collectives...everybody knows everybody's business ...people need each other in a very different way than in the West. I do think it indulges those notions of control. Because if you know everybody and know everything, there is nothing you feel control of... other people have it...your father has control, your brother has control (Rima,⁴⁰ Interview 46).

The underpinning of honor for both family and community is dependent on the “good” behavior of its women and girls.

An educated girl is awful...people would say to her grandmother: “how bezzati to allow your daughters to go to school (Farzana,⁴¹ Interview 47).

³⁹ Rania is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #27.

⁴⁰ Rima is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #46.

⁴¹ Farzana is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #47.

“Good/moral/honorable” and “bad/immoral/dishonorable” in this context are cultural expressions of the white /non-white dichotomy where whiteness is reduced to a shameful state of being. One interviewee likened the perception of “white women” to being naked (Hanaa,⁴² Interview 65).

Rukhsana summed it up as the following:

White fear is the fear of the unknown...what they did know was that white girls wore short skirts and low-cut tops...they would see so much flesh being shown, and it was an indication of moral decline (Interview 63).

White is not attributed to race but instead, a diasporic articulation of the other: emphasizing its contrasting modern traditions and culture. Reflecting on her own hybrid British-Asian identity, Batul⁴³ explains:

As a Pakistani, girls were put into a certain box, and boys were put into a certain box. You have to cover yourself. You are not allowed to go out. Even at a really young age I was seeing this around me. It was enforced in my head. When I used to see kids in school that were “MO-DERN,” kids who used to have birthday parties or went out with white friends. I used to think that is not right, that is not me (Interview 5).

Summarily, what is perceived as “white” or *gora* makes crucial determinations as to what gendered practices are accepted or rejected in the new cultural space. For Naseem, wanting a divorce, people accused her of thinking “she is white” or “too westernized” (Interview 11).

Habiba⁴⁴ outlines the rules of comportment:

Education was not pushed as the same as her brothers, there was a fear that I might become too western...I do it with my daughter. We’re tribal...we dress a bit more different. We don’t believe in divorce. We do *purdah* (cover my hair and face). You are wearing trousers...our girls don’t wear trousers. Even now we don’t go out, we don’t do the hotel or restaurant thing, it’s not considered good – to be eating out – culturally, we don’t like our women outside, even

⁴² Hanaa is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #65.

⁴³ Batul is is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #5.

⁴⁴ Habiba is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #59.

if it is with your husband... would not be okay if daughter went down to the city center (Interview 59).

A useful deterrent in policing female behavior is the fear of community members labeling one “white” or a “coconut”⁴⁵ (brown on the outside, white on the inside). Inserted in to British space, are a number of protective devices to accommodate the territorial dislocation of home. In this desire to safeguard its women, community members re-activated the religio-cultural traditions of sexual segregation, dress (to be discussed in chapter four) and endogamous marriages.

In its most idealized conformation, the doctrine of gender segregation is conceived in absolutes. Inherited from the Arabic word harem,⁴⁶ *purdah* is a regulatory mechanism to forestall the interaction between unrelated men and women. There is a delineated allocation of space to each gender; the public is strictly male and the private is the domestic realm of women. These physical boundaries often function to curtail the movement of women, and in doing so, the boundaries ensure few women trespass into the public male world (Mills, 2003; Mernissi, 1991). *Purdah* is a cultural instrument that not only moderates spatial arrangements, but also intervenes in social relations, permitting who can to speak to whom.

Predictably, migration to the West by social actors consigned to this way of life posits a pragmatic dilemma. How does one reproduce segregated space as imagined in the homeland? By changing physical and cultural landscapes, South Asian Muslims confront the moral obligation of re-inscribing their particular religio-cultural identity into British space. Born in Bangladesh, and immigrated to Britain in 1973, Baroness Manzila Uddin offers her insight:

⁴⁵ Batul further defines “coconut” as someone who doesn’t associate with the Asian community all the time or associates with white friends or dresses differently (Interview 5).

⁴⁶ The word *harem* in Arabic means a sacred, inviolable space, and it also means the female members of the family. From the same root comes also the word *haram*, which bears a double-meaning: forbidden or sacred and protected (Graham-Brown, 1998).

Immigration plays a huge deviant role in leading a culture astray to a certain extent – migration means you are struggling to cope with nuances and the preservation of home culture...If you are faced with huge amounts of animosity then the behavior, understandings, the culture, the context, the language, the familiarity – will be most prominent in your mind, and you feel a sense of belonging – I can see the process of how a person or community become isolated and the preservation of their culture is most important (Interview 64)

I argue that in exile, it limits opportunities for the wholesale revival of religio-cultural traditions. Instead, there is selective negotiation, both collectively and as individuals, with the religious, cultural and social meanings by which immigrants define their distinctiveness.

A literalist interpretation of gender segregation-the preference to confine women to the home may not be fully realized as the tradition travels across borders. Instead, there is a mediating effect on traditions, and accordingly, practices do not reveal themselves in the mirror image of the original, but are reflected and refracted by the diasporic lens, imbuing cultural norms with new meanings and significance. For South Asian Muslims, the challenge was to embrace the idea of “Britishness,” and at the same time, insure the survival of a religio-culture that was perceived to be antithetical to British norms. Strategically, gender segregation re-presented itself along re-conceptualized moral and social boundaries.

As the British South Asian diasporans settled, the process transformed everyday practice to adapt to its new cultural and social landscape. In Birmingham, settlement took place in consciously built, spatially segregated areas. Migrants were able to claim a “Pakistani” space in the predominantly white, working class city landscape. With the establishment of residential settlements came the arrival of a community space marked with Asian shops, mosques, schools, community centers and restaurants. By ethnically segregating, the South Asian community “created an environment of social welfare and cohesion in an antagonistic environment, and it fostered the perpetuation of traditional norms, values, and beliefs amongst the newcomers”

(Nasser 2003, 29). Debates centering on segregation and integration continue to dominate media and government reports. In January 2008, a senior bishop of the Church of England is quoted in *The Sunday Telegraph* as saying: “Muslims have created no-go areas across Britain where it is too dangerous for non-Muslims to enter” (January 6, 2008). Bayan,⁴⁷ a community cohesion organizer in Blackburn, says ghettoized neighborhoods are less about the failure to integrate and more about safety in numbers. She challenges further the accusation “Muslims are sleepwalking into segregation.” Citing a report in the *Guardian* about the most segregated communities in Britain, she suggests:

It was reported that the Jewish community were the most segregated in Britain--Jewish schools, Jewish hospitals, Jewish businesses – their segregation is meant to be problematic partly because I believe they are from a wealthier community, partly because they are not visible – they are much more of an invisible minority and thirdly, they don’t create waves – because they are so segregated, they don’t require kosher meals in a public environment – because they are so insulated their needs are met in their community – the waves are created by those who are seeking to integrate – they are voicing their needs – all of sudden your marks of difference become paramount because in order to integrate your differences need to be accommodated” (Interview13).

Zakia,⁴⁸ born and raised in Small Heath, a densely populated Asian neighborhood, explains the motivation:

There is a sense of comfort and security especially with initial racism...having a sense of belonging – they felt comfortable in alcoves with similar people with similar religious and culture beliefs. They were able to open businesses that provided the things they needed, halal meat etc. They really held on to that for the last thirty years as a security blanket. If you look at Pakistan now, what they hold on to here, doesn’t really exist in the big cities in Pakistan...it is very modernized now. They still hold on to ideals

⁴⁷ Bayan is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #13.

⁴⁸ Zakia is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #16.

from the sixties and seventies and want to reproduce it here ... they want to maintain their culture and religious beliefs (Interview 16).

A primary objective for community members within this social geography was to police religious-cultural values at an intimate level. Shaheen⁴⁹ elucidates the discourse working against women:

Parents are really scared of what is going to happen to a girl if she leaves the home, so they try to keep a stranglehold on them. It is safer to keep them in the house. Why is the reputation important? Because people talk. The parents are thinking that girls need to get married off, and if people talk, then what about family izzat? If someone sees me having coffee with a guy, people will think is she of ill repute. If you put this thinking into an Asian community where brothers are protective of their sisters, and if the sister is caught in a situation, there is bound to be trouble. And “*Auntiejees*” (term of formal respect for aunts) are known for gossiping (Interview 4).

This resolve to maintain honor shaped forms of cultural practices affecting women. A collaborator explains:

“Cultural expectations were very high and very strict [for girls]. They didn’t want girls [like those in Western countries] with loose morals- clubbing, pubbing, chatting up with boys-they want girls to keep respect in society (Ambareen,⁵⁰ Interview 20).

There was and continues to be an attempt to subsume the plurality of the British culture in favor of a fixed model of cultural difference; an understanding that communicates a distinction between Asian Muslim women and westernized women. This narrative of difference emboldened a hyper-idealized notion of what Asian Muslim women should do, think and wear.

British South Asian Muslims, punctuated by this expressed need to emphasize difference, chose to strike a delicate balance between fear of disturbing the line between public and private, and the wholesale prohibition of women’s access to the public sphere. Accordingly, community members (men and women), in the site of cultural politics, intervened, and re-wrote spatial and

⁴⁹ Shaheen is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #4.

⁵⁰ Ambareen is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #20.

social codes to accommodate the spatio-temporal change. Paradigmatic to this narrative is the ideological assumption as reviewed earlier that women, as agents of the cultural nation, are repositories of honor and as such, their virginity/sexuality need to be protected. It is unambiguous in terms of how honor can be breached; any contact with an unrelated male can violate moral codes. The participants in my study provided a range of answers to the question of how they were limited as a result of being female.⁵¹ The following are characteristic responses:

[According to] Muslim men, older generation of Muslim women, or even younger girls who have been under the influence, a ‘good girl’ is someone who stays at home, who doesn’t challenge anybody, who listens to the dominant male in her life, who does everything she is told and does not do anything for herself (Batul, Interview 5).

We were not allowed to go out in the evenings, parties, no watching TV, no trips, no going to the cinema...the issue was not mixing with the opposite sex (Ambareen, Interview 20).

They are people in the community who think girls should not be allowed out of the house, getting an education, going out with friends, or even shopping. If they go out, their mum has to be with them at all times. For example, for some of the girls, city center is a forbidden place. It is considered bad; it is considered that you are getting too much freedom. You should be banned to the home (Azkaa,⁵² Interview 38).

For most of the respondents, their parents’ fear of their female offspring “mixing with boys” or “coming home pregnant” was the catalyst to circumscribe their movement in public space.

The logical consequence to this fear is an alternative paradigm that constructs and codes physical sites as permissible or prohibited, and at the same time, reinforces their religio-cultural

⁵¹ Corroborating my findings is the report “She Who Disputes: Muslim Women Shape the Debate”, compiled by the Muslim Women’s Network. Recording the voices of British, Muslim women, the report highlights what women identified as barriers they encounter both in the public and within their own communities. (November 2006)

⁵² Azkaa is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #38.

identity. To give a sense of “home,” Farisa⁵³ describes her parents’ town in Pakistan: “The town is restrictive – wherever you lived, your house was your space and anything out of that would be foreign space, and then you would need a companion and a chaperone to go with you” (Interview 22). Mirroring this sensibility in the South Asian diaspora, foreign space, I argue, is defined unconsciously as space dominated by whites. Echoing Chatterjee’s ghar/bahir narrative, variants of what is considered “inside” and “outside” play out in cultural conversations within community settings. For Rana,⁵⁴ her father insisted “outside the house is England, inside this house is India” (Interview 61). Similarly, for forty-nine year old Rukhsana, telling me her parents were worried about the influence of the white community on her:

[Having] tasted only a white style of life outside and within my own four walls in my home, I was another person. Parents wanted me to be a Pakistani girl...by age ten, I was not allowed to play on the streets, I was not allowed to mix in their homes- I became terribly isolated (Interview 63).

Cultural Mapping of Birmingham:

To this point, I argue that the imagined moral boundaries are relational to the mapping of “local” space. The urban planning of Birmingham lends itself to this discussion. Evolving from a city that housed a small group of migrant factory workers,⁵⁵ Birmingham now is an expanded site of social containment including a larger immigrant collective. The city is conceptualized in distinct rings. The “inner ring” functions as the center of the city, positioned around High Street shops and the Bull Ring, one of Europe's largest city centre shopping centers. Currently, South

⁵³ Farisa is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #22.

⁵⁴ Rana is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #61.

⁵⁵ Settlers worked in the metal-bashing foundries and hosiery industries in the West and East Midlands. For further details on the immigrant settlement history of South Asians in Britain, see Michael Fisher, Shompa Lahiri and Shinder Thandi. *A South-Asian History of Britain: Four Centuries of Peoples from the Indian Sub-Continent*. (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007)

Asian Muslims in Birmingham are concentrated in various inner city areas forming the “middle ring;” this includes wards such as Sparkbrook, Bordesley Green, Washwood Heath, Small Heath, Moseley and King’s Heath. To give an indication of demographics, based on a 2001 census, in Sparkbrook, 40.5% of the population, and in Small Heath, 50.6% were Asian Pakistani (Abbas, 2005). As noted earlier, these homogenous ethnic wards are supported by “local” economies (specialist goods and service outlets such as halal butchers and restaurants, grocery, clothing and jewelry retail outlets, video stores, banquet halls, community centers and schools), where its residents can live and work. Researching a story after 7/7, Rima, was “astonished” at how little the country had integrated, saying that Birmingham or Bradford feels like “another country.” Speaking about her own childhood, she describes her family as “incredibly ghettoized,” explaining that her parents had no English friends and tried to bring her up to believe “white people were not to be trusted.” She believes the possibility of fraternizing with the English “filled them with horror,” and thus, they retreated to the “things they could be sure of, the cultural mores they inherited from their parents and their religion” (Interview 46). The social-spatial ordering of Birmingham reflects, I argue, this ideological nostalgia for home where immigrant residents can reproduce non-Western social structures and fortify a communal sense of belonging.

The degree to which a girl or woman is threatened by other influences, determines her access to space, a space marked by an invisible inside/outside border. Extending beyond the convention of home, the inside/outside binary includes known streets, wards, and for some, the city limits; outside the city limit or the imagined “Pakistani” or “Asian” space is in a literal sense outside their subjectivity and inside, is the site of an insular enclave where women are safe and within the dominion of community policing. Within this boundary, families rely on the authority

of the maxim “What will friends, family and neighbors think or say?” to discipline the comportment of its female members. My respondents describe the public spaces in which they could move. Most travel freely within their wards, including residential and commercial streets (Stratford Road, Coventry Road).⁵⁶ For many, their movement can extend beyond the limits of the local wards to include the city center (I met many of the participants in the Bull Ring Birmingham mall to conduct interviews). For most of the aforementioned, shopping and socializing are unobjectionable social diversions. The majority of whom I interviewed have been or still are restricted travel outside of Birmingham, for the purpose of leisure or for education.⁵⁷

My findings reveal to what limits British South Asian Muslim women, tempered by this religio-cultural norm, are adapting to the host or for most, home society.⁵⁸ Against this background where perceptions of English immorality dominate, it advances, I suggest, the physical and intellectual ghettoization of my research participants; one of my respondents spoke of women placed in what she describes as “mental ghettos” where families hold these women prisoner to a version of Islam imbued with cultural patriarchy, a version that compromises the promise of its females and decidedly favors the male members of the south Asian community. Families take these women to task of maintaining familial, communal and cultural continuity. The following are three examples:

⁵⁶ I did not have contact with women confined strictly to the home. However their stories of strict segregation were related to me. Described as being prisoners in their home, these women are not permitted outside their front door without being accompanied by a male member of the family.

⁵⁷ A point of note, a number of respondents equated going away on holiday as a “white” concept. For one respondent, commenting on her colleagues’ travels to France and Spain and eating out at restaurants, she realized she was different than them [whites] - “it drew a fine line between them and us” (Interview 78).

⁵⁸ The first section of my interview questions the ways in which they participants identified themselves and where they identified home? The majority response is that they see themselves as hyphenated identities, British-Asian-Muslim. Home, for the majority, is Britain.

My dad was really strict. They [parents] came to this country with the same culture and traditions, which have stayed and not moved on. At age twelve, I was not allowed to study and sent back home to live with grandmother. My dad did not want western culture to impact his daughters (Rania, Interview 27).

From an early age, I thought Asians suppressed women. All I saw were housewives but not very happy housewives. Women were not allowed to drive or told to dress in a certain way...always being told what to do. Women were always at home. If they needed to go anywhere they needed to rely on a man in terms of transport. Nobody worked. After sixteen, there was no further education. Women were not allowed to participate which meant they didn't learn to speak English. They didn't know about the opportunities available for their children. Boys were encouraged to do things, whereas girls were encouraged to sit home, learn sewing and cooking, and then get married (Rabina, Interview 12).

The mothers are at home and have not had a space to express themselves...husbands keep them in their home as wives and mothers. Mothers have passed this on to their daughters...some of the girls we work with study in all girls school and then come home, that's it – they don't have room to go out – they are not allowed to go out because it is not a female-safe environment...parents want to protect them (Zakia, Interview 16).

The demands placed on women are reflective of, at times, a contrary understanding of Islam. Implicating behavior as “bad” or “haram,” religious ideology is used to justify what are presumably cultural edicts, the physical and cerebral segregation of movement and mind. Many women in my study, out of profound duty to family, community, culture and religion, confine themselves to opportunities esteemed unobjectionable by the social authority. One such example is Mina, a twenty-nine year old, self-identified British Pakistani, married at nineteen to “someone back home,” who now wants a divorce. However, her mother has told her that she “will be a bad Muslim” if she continues with her decision (Interview 40). A striking feature of this ghettoization is the emphasis of early arranged marriages and the marginalization of girls in education.

The enduring concern within the British South Asian Muslim community to protect its girls heightens the popularity of marrying off girls, as young as sixteen, presumably to ensure their virginity remains intact. Moreover, the majority of these marriages “are consanguineous (taking place between kin of the same blood), usually involving first or second cousins... and are predominantly transnational” (Shaw and Charsley 2006, 405). Marriages of this kind are purposeful for a number of reasons. First, it assures families that there will be no caste or class violation. Caste, in this context, refers to tribal or genealogical affiliations. Second, marrying within kin serves a pragmatic economic function. Families can continue the labor migration cycle by providing an opportunity for extended family members to immigrate to the UK. Third, transnational marriages accommodate the disconnect from home by ensuring, through the recurrent flow of persons, that cultural, religious and social links remain intact and continue to strengthen in the diaspora.⁵⁹

For my informants, the aforementioned marriage practice remains prohibitive on two fronts: First, despite a longstanding South Asian diaspora in the UK, anachronistic religio-cultural traditions and practices imported from home do not fall into disuse and instead, cultural conservatism continues to nourish the community and collide within an evolving space. Second, a number of my informants reported having forcibly married or being expected to marry their first or second cousins, the majority from Pakistan and Bangladesh. The following are two examples: Seema,⁶⁰ a twenty-eight year-old police officer, the only Muslim female officer in Small Heath, grew up in a very traditional household. Seema was born in Birmingham, while her parents migrated from the Mir Pur region of Pakistan. Growing up, she was not allowed “to

⁵⁹ For a more detailed reading refer to Alison Shaw and Katherine Charsley’s article, “*Rishtas*: adding emotion to strategy in understanding British Pakistani transnational marriages.” It offers an analysis into the motivations behind arranged consanguineous marriages.

⁶⁰ Seema is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #69.

socialize,” not allowed to “have friends in the house,” and expected to discontinue her education in favor of an early marriage. In her words:

When I was fifteen, my dad told me that I was going to have an arranged marriage. When I went to Pakistan, the whole house was decorated for me to get married, I told them no, I will not get married – the whole family turned against me, they threatened to take away my passport. No one was speaking to me...there was a girl (seven years old) who used to do the sweeping for us-the highlight of my day was when she would turn up. I had to stay in Pakistan for six months, until my father relented and let me come back to UK (Interview 69).

Her decision to resist the marriage was costly. Her family accused her of bringing disgrace to the family and accordingly stopped speaking to her for a number of years. Jamia,⁶¹ a thirty-eight year-old British, Muslim Bangladeshi woman, on the other hand was unable to refuse her father’s wishes. Born and raised in Birmingham, Jamia was not allowed to go out by herself; she always had to be with a parent. Her father, too, expected her to “give up her studies and get married.” At sixteen, on a trip to Bangladesh, Jamia was not allowed to return until she married the man her father had chosen for her. She stayed in Bangladesh for “two years, two months and two weeks,” until she relented and was finally married (Interview 62). Today, Jamia remains in a troubled marriage. Characteristic to both women is the demands placed on their bodily movements in service to religio-cultural ideologues. It should be noted that while a full exploration of forced marriages, where matches are forced upon unwilling young people under familial and communal pressure is outside the purview of this research, many respondents attribute it as an undercurrent to other social ills afflicting the South Asian community-drug use and domestic violence-thereby making it a forerunning issue in multicultural public policy debates in Britain.

⁶¹ Jamia is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #62.

It would be inaccurate for me to suggest that all marriages in the South Asian Muslim community are variations of early, consanguineous and/or forced marriages. However, for my purpose, the cultural convention for girls to marry early deserves attention because of its effect on educational attainment in British, South Asian Muslim diaspora. There is a general consensus among the women I interviewed that the pursuit of education continues to yield to the desirability of marriage. Girls are expected to “give up their studies” to marry. Shazia,⁶² a member of the Muslim Women’s Network UK, paints the picture in broad strokes:

Within the working class sensibility, women are expected to have a certain role (in the UK, middle-class Muslims make up a minority, working-class Muslims are the majority). There is a mentality that what is the point [of education], they are going to have children, get married, they don’t really need an education... they are worried that the girls are going to become “westernized” [if they go away to school], they will meet the opposite member of sex...they [Parents] want to their children to marry cousins and bring them over [from Pakistan]. If you let your daughter go away to university, she is more likely to say no because you are a lot stronger a lot more independent, but at a younger age they are more likely to agree (Interview 23).

In a community context where lack of social and cultural conformity can lead to social exclusion, the religio-cultural norms accordingly operating in this space “inhibit the educational progression beyond a certain point” (Abbas 2003, 413). The community derision for unmarried girls results in a group mentality unwilling to pursue education beyond that which is mandatory. Even when some individuals encourage their girls to be educated, there is a community and familial force advising against such desire. Sharing their stories, both Azkaa (twenty-six years old) and Shamim⁶³ (thirty-nine years old) confirm this point:

Culturally, if you are girl, you should sit and home, you don’t need to go to school...should get married. All of the people from our

⁶² Shazia is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #23.

⁶³ Shamim is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #45.

village and here think this way. When we were in school, my parents got harassed by the community...asking why we were in school, saying we were girls and got our education at the primary level [which is up to the age of eleven]. They said we can read and write and therefore, do not need to go any further. (Azkaa, Interview 38)

Education in our times was non-existent. My dad was influenced by other family members...they used to say ‘daughters don’t go to college, they don’t need to be educated, they need to stay at home.’ Eventually I gave up at 19 [studied 1 year of A levels]. The college was not near the house, so uncle followed [her] to see if [she] was speaking to any boys and then, would come home and report his findings. [Her] sister saw what she went through and decided not to go to college. If you haven’t got the fight for it, then you give up. I knew I was going to get married anyway. I thought what am I fighting for...they are not going to let me go to uni to get a degree. (Shamim, Interview 45)

Shamim, ultimately married her first cousin. Azkaa, on the other hand, was allowed to get educated and is still unmarried. Ironically, continually reinforcing the perception that education impedes marriage is the number of educated yet still unmarried girls in the community. For example, Nasia,⁶⁴ a thirty-year-old British, Bangladeshi woman, earned a PhD from Cambridge but remains single. Her parents are finding it difficult to arrange a marriage for her because she is too educated. To the question: does her example make others more fearful of educating their daughters? She answers a resounding yes:

This is happening [compelling daughters to marry early and not be educated]. My younger sister’s friends have inadvertently told her that their parents have advised them to complete a three-year university program and then get married so that they same thing does not happen to them. My sister told me they are talking about me. Her friends tell her that she should not go to med school because she will not be able to get married. (Interview 36)

Additionally, to further the distrust, it is educated women who have met and married white men. In what I describe as “South Asian flight,” there is a pattern of girls who move away

⁶⁴ Nasia is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #36.

from home to attend university marrying white men. This undoubtedly reinforces familial and communal fear of education. The values towards education thereupon are shaped by a two-fold consideration: first, girls should aspire only to the domestic sphere and second, “schools are thought of as a mechanism that may threaten their pubescent daughters” (Abbas 2003, 413). My respondents reported a general anxiety in the community about the corruptive influence of higher education. Following are two examples that illustrate the point:

Sonia⁶⁵ explains: My marriage was pushed when certain things happened in the family. My cousin left home to go to university. It was a shock to my family - we are very close-knit family. She left without her parent’s permission. They thought she would come home on weekends, but she found somebody and never came back home.

With that, and me being second in line, I had a lot of pressure to get married and do the right thing for the rest of the family – to bring the rest of the girls in line. At the time I was doing my A-levels, I had to go to libraries to study and field trips-it put a lot of pressure on me. It became my responsibility to redeem the family name – bring back the honor. Because of the pressure, I did not take my exams. After the summer break, I thought I would be able to return but it did not happen. My family had lost confidence in the educational institutes. They thought it was [education] was diverting them [children] away from their morals and values

She married her first cousin from Pakistan (Interview 9).

Nida’s⁶⁶ family history tells a similar tale:

My parents did not believe in the education of their daughters. My two elder sisters were married to first cousins at the age of sixteen. My third sister was also engaged to a cousin at a young age. However, she did not want to conform, so she joined the police force. She was the first Mir Puri Asian girl to get into the Westminster Police Scheme. My parents disowned her, as she had shamed the family and culture. The isolation proved to be too difficult and eventually she conformed to my parents’ wishes and married a cousin in Pakistan. She is broken now.

⁶⁵ Sonia is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #9.

⁶⁶ Nida is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #28.

My sister's behavior had a major effect on me. My parents told me that I could not go to college, but I resisted. I was engaged to my cousin. They agreed that I could go to college for two years, then when I was eighteen, I would have to get married. When I was eighteen, I wanted to go to university. My parents were not happy but relented because they did not want what happened to my other sister to happen to me [she moved out]. I went to Worcester-it was an hour and half train journey. I could not live on campus, so I had to commute. I eventually transferred to local uni. In 2003, when I was nineteen, my parents wanted me to marry my cousin but I wanted to finish my studies. I led a double life, when I was outside the home, I did everything, I drank, smoked cannabis, but when I came home, I put on the shalwar kameez and became the good Mir Puri girl. From age nineteen to twenty-two, I was going out with a guy. My mother found out [her sister told on her], and made her get a *nikaah* (Muslim marriage). I married for nine months but it didn't work out, so we got a divorce. My uncle stopped speaking to my mum and dad because I did not marry my cousin (Interview 28).

What the experience of my respondents demonstrates is that distrust in educational settings within wider unrestrained community structures continue to reinforce the religio-cultural norm of inhibiting education. For the participants in my research, their experiences in education depend entirely on the level of parental and communal confidence that religious or cultural transgressions at school can be avoided. There are distinguishing characteristics required to facilitate education and remain faithful to a competing religio-cultural space: same-sex education, and school uniforms that accommodate cultural dress. Most of the respondents' parents supported their education until age sixteen. At age sixteen, students usually undertake advanced level subjects (A-Level) to gain admission into higher-level academic institutions. It is at this point that limited possibilities for same-sex educational settings and the push for kinship marriages collide; many of my respondents are forced to withdraw from school or confront resistance if they choose to continue.

From Being Guest to Being at “Home:”

Among the preceding generations of South Asian Muslim British women, there is slow momentum for change. With that being said, there are now emerging points of resistance within the community. I believe accounting for this change is that women, born and raised in the UK, now see Britain as their home. Unlike their parents and extended family members, who accept a state of temporality and still imagine a return to the “homeland,” these women embrace the permanence of their space. Underscoring this point, Nadia and Rana tell me:

This is my home. I went to Pakistan when I was twelve. The trip was fantastic. I realized it [Pakistan] was not my home. My curiosity had gone. I was happy to say this is my home. I think it is important that I am not torn between countries. I don't think I can be happy anywhere else. This is my home. This is my country. I don't have anywhere else to go. I don't want to go anywhere else. For me, I want to be and practice to be a Muslim in this country (Interview 3).

For my parents, they didn't really feel that England was their home. They would behave as they were guests in someone else's home. I remember when we used to take the bus, the bus driver would ask us to get off earlier than our stops - just to get us off the bus - my mum would not argue she would just do it. That would not happen to me today. I am not a guest here. This is my country (Interview 61).

For these women, the spatial and cultural disconnect between South Asia and Britain is much more profound than for their kin. Instead, they embody the duality of being both British and South Asian and are no longer invested in the singular focus of preserving their parents' home culture. Living in the diaspora affords them the opportunity to be self-critical, and to discontinue gendered practices that are harmful to women.

Yet, understanding that they continue to be “seen as foreigners” they do not adopt wholesale the English⁶⁷ cultural narrative. South Asian, Muslim women in the diaspora persist in negotiating complex questions of identity, attributing parts of their selves as incongruent with the dominant race and religion. My respondents still share a variation of the “us” and “them” mentality, where they draw distinctions between themselves and whites. It is not their sense of “Britishness” or British identity that is fragile but rather my interviewees share confusion as how to define British values or behavior. Having emigrated from Pakistan at one year old, and having spent the majority of her life in Britain, Naseem considers herself “British/Kashmir/Pakistani.” She does not deny one over the other: “I always say that I can’t be English because my parents’ names are not John and Susan instead are Muhammad and Zubaida. I don’t see it as a negative-I see it as being two things at once.” She strongly reacts to the assumption (by “White, British society and the government”) that she is not patriotic and believes that she is questioned only because she is Muslim. Recounting her experience, she puts it to the government to tell her what Britishness is:

My friends and I sit on the National Community Forum, which is a government sounding body, and we talked about what is Britishness, and we could not work it out. What we came up with was this: talking about the weather – if it’s hot we moan, if it’s cold we moan, if it’s raining we moan. The other thing we came up is fish and chips. Everything we thought was British, we looked into its background and realized it was something we stolen as British people from other cultures. The other thing we came up with was dressing for dinner, and loving the Queen (and really she is the biggest foreigner, German). I don’t really know what is Britishness? I would really like the government to teach me. We have a Scottish

⁶⁷ Distinctions are made between English and British. To be British, encompasses citizenship and acting in accordance with “laws of the land.” Despite the complexities of what Englishness means for Britons, e.g. Welsh or Irish, for the Asian community to be English personifies being “white” and a singular white culture. To quote one of my respondents: “Overriding I feel British, not English – English is about culture. I don’t identify with English culture because my parents are not English” (Sana, Interview 54).

prime minister who is going to teach us about Britishness. Excuse me if it sounds like am taking the mic but I am, because people are taking the mic with me.

Immigration does not take away who you are. Instead, she believes it adds to one's identity (Interview 11). Despite this duality of consciousness, then, in which feelings of belongingness are never certain, these women are not willing to make any concessions. They seek and demand that they should be able to live in Britain, their home, on their own terms.

A state of permanence, I contend, helps these women feel confidence and security that they have recourse to government, protection from the state, legal redresses and support from public monies. Sana, for example, first became politicized when "called a Paki for the first time." She remembers "feeling outrage," thinking she was no less than British whites but instead their equal. She is now campaigning to run in elections for the Respect Party (Interview 54).

Undeterred by manifestations of racism, my collaborators find safety in the public space. I interviewed a number of women, who themselves contested familial expectations, now work in community-based projects, funded through city grants, seeking to provide support to women in similar struggles. Tanveer,⁶⁸ thirty-one years old, sits on the committee of Artists Circle, a platform for Muslim artists that utilizes art as a tool of empowerment. The motivation for Tanveer, in her words: "For me, this is home. I need to build safety measures...even if it is doesn't happen to you, you have the responsibility to create a safe place" (Interview 1). There is self-awareness among the women I met that there needs to be a cultural shift in thinking towards self and community. Utilizing community centers, public funds allocated to their residential wards, and employing a gender and religious sensitive approach, my collaborators confront both

⁶⁸ Tanveer is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #1.

the internal religio-cultural monolith, and the external economic deprivation of their residential community.

Local grassroots resistance is operating on a number of fronts: encouraging education for women and girls, developing community services and engaging in community leadership. Bayan, for example, works in an organization that is trying to get communities that are “subject to social exclusion or are vulnerable to social exclusion” to have a direct voice in policy. She works as a consultant to develop policies: “policies that are shaped by people on the ground” (Interview 13). After 9/11, inspired by the anti-war movement, British, Asian Muslim women are galvanizing themselves to be more political at the local, national and international level. Salma Yaqoob, a British Pakistani, involves herself, for example, in local politics to target the issues within Birmingham’s disadvantaged community. Described as “single handedly changing the way we perceive Muslim women” (Munia⁶⁹, Interview 68), Yaqoob acts as an elected councilor of the Respect Party and concerns herself with the lived reality of Muslims and non-Muslims alike in the Birmingham area, that is, ordinary resident issues like “poor council housing” or “issues about rubbish pickup” (Salma, Interview 29). Commenting on Yaqoob, Munia opines:

Unless you change the poverty, low levels of education attainment, overcrowding, and health, you won’t be able to change anything. You need to look at the fundamental issues affecting Muslim community to move forward (Interview 68).

Yaqoob, in turn, emboldens other women’s politicization. At a neighborhood meeting, a group of local women, activists and housewives, hold workshops with local ward advisors to ask questions about “local ward structure, how decisions are made by councilors, learn about techniques about campaigning and lobbying, media training - how to be savvy about media, and how to interpret the truth and propaganda” (Zakia, Interview 16). Attending one such workshop,

⁶⁹ Munia is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #68.

for instance, the women convene to meet Yaqoob to educate themselves about empowerment strategies, and ways for Asian women to engage in community leadership. They “want to learn the tools to take on in their own lives” (Zakia, Interview 16). Embracing a more gender-specific perspective, Rania, thirty-four years old, is a women’s development officer for Roshni Women’s Center. Roshni provides “temporary and emergency accommodations for South Asian women, from the age of sixteen, fleeing conflict homes (forced marriage and domestic violence)” (Interview 27). She herself resisted pressure to marry young and remains single today.

Alia,⁷⁰ twenty-three years old, shares a similar life story. At age twenty, her mother wanted her to marry her cousin in Pakistan. She explains:

It was a long struggle. I never thought they would ask that of me. I never had the support of any agencies. I kept saying no. It wasn’t easy. It was emotionally and psychologically damaging at the time. I kept saying no. And they knew that if they had forced me to go somewhere that there were laws and regulations to protect me. Not that they were scared but that they knew I would speak up (Interview 7).

She now works for the Sparkbrook Domestic Violence Forum.

What is striking about the women noted above is that despite their commitment to public service, these women often battle familial and communal criticism underscoring their unconventional gender role. Salma Yaqoob, now a mythic figure on the Birmingham political stage,⁷¹ was initially challenged/threatened by British, Asian men in Sparkbrook and Small Heath. Sharing her past, she tells me:

There was no precedence for women leaders. Men would come up to my husband and say: “Have you no shame, what kind of man are you for letting your wife speak in public.” At that time, it was a

⁷⁰ Alia is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #7.

⁷¹ In 2006, *Harper’s Bazaar UK* named her in the top thirty list of British women, who were “women shaping Britain.” In 2009, the *Guardian*, named Yaqoob, “the most prominent Muslim woman in British public life.”

debate whether a Muslim woman should speak in public, never-mind what she was saying, the subtext was that you were loose. My husband was very supportive. There was pressure in the family, my father was nervous, and asked me “please don’t do this, you will bring shame on us, it is not the done thing” (Interview 29).

Whilst for Salma a grudging respect came about, for Rania and Alia, often accused as being a corrupting influence in the community, it has been less than successful. They are seen as catalysts in fracturing families. When explaining to her parents, that Alia will be helping women in trouble, her mother’s response was “Oh, divorced women, Oh, bad women- she is someone who does not listen to her husband.” Similarly, Rania at Roshni Women’s Center explains:

all refuges [shelters] have a bad reputation in the Muslim community. The perception is that they break families. Personally, I don’t tell people where I work because Asian people say I am breaking homes...not that we are giving them confidence but we are giving them too much independence to leave their husbands (Interview 27).

Incidentally, community members believe Roshni is a brothel. Both Rania and Alia exemplify what I believe to be mired at the crossroads of feminism and faith. Roshni and other state-based organizations operate within a white feminist framework, and are hostile to religion. The organizations do not provide a Muslim-sensitive support network. For example, some accusations leveled at the state-funded refuges include: they do not permit mediation, and instead they seek to dissolve families. Additionally, on-site, the refuges fail to understand the daily Muslim experience, including dietary restrictions, or alternative kitchen schedules during the month of Ramadan. Following this line of criticism of state-based organizations, the women who work for such organizations, are also perceived to be co-opted by the Western feminist gaze, espousing neocolonialism, betraying their community and culture, and slandering Islam. These allegations demonstrate further the uneasy relationship between white feminist thought and practice, and Asian religio-cultural dogma, the latter incompatible with the former.

Move from Private to the Public:

The question remains how to champion feminism and address gender discrimination within a struggling diasporic space beset by questions of cultural and religious authenticity. Currently, I believe second and third generation South Asian Muslims in the British diaspora are answering the question at both a pragmatic and theoretical level. To reconcile the opportune for change, with the community demand to resist such efforts, these women are gently pushing against the male monopoly of communal public space. As a community development coordinator, Naureen⁷² for example, found it difficult to sustain female participation because as she found out: “men were saying [to their women]: “if men are there, you can’t go.” Across the board the message was: “my husband will get funny with me if there is men around” (Interview 31). By appealing to community insecurities, and by making assurances of minimal religio-cultural displacement, the quiet movement of body from private to public is choreographed strategically so as to incite little noise from community members. To do so, they are selectively appropriating culturally specific values and norms from “home” and integrating its intended intent into the British public collective. These women are advancing their interests, specifically, by developing and utilizing women-only social spaces outside the private home. Inimical to conventional mixed-sex settings, the ethos of women-only spaces compliment communal sensibility by mimicking gender-segregation conceptualized by South Asian tradition. British South Asian Muslim women are creating new gendered identities within the religio-cultural context of their everyday life.

I define women-only spaces as spaces that restrict access to women and are not necessarily defined by physical markers. They include social groups, educational and

⁷² Naureen is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #31.

recreational classes and sporting facilities. Most important, they function in the public space, but are least hostile to the values and norms in the private sphere. Operating in local neighborhoods, government-funded community centers, in particular, develop initiatives that will enable these women to develop skills, encourage involvement in sports and arts and enhance community cohesion and integration. At the Balsall Heath Community center, one can find, for example, women-only citizenship classes, craft and sewing sessions, swimming lessons, postnatal classes and Bollywood dancing. Akin to this exercise of grassroots mobilization, Munia, a thirty-nine years -old British-Bangladeshi, works for Ashram, a housing association and community investment and research agency. Ashram manages community-based projects that search for ways for the Muslim community, especially Muslim women, to “improve the life chances and quality of life of disadvantaged BME groups in the inner city areas of West Midlands’ cities and towns.” Affirming the importance of all-female environments, Munia outlines Ashram’s philosophy:

Dialogue dries up because the men don’t want them to continue [their education] That’s when we have conversation with extended family, we tell them your sister, your wife, your daughter is in safe hands when she comes to talk to us. You have to be canny...if you start dialogue with the wider community, then you have a better chance of succeeding with these women. You have get the buy-in from the wider community, which is usually the men-folk. Men need to know you make them comfortable.

In having a long-standing dialogue, we have gained their trust and entered into a relationship with these women. If am waxing lyrical about forced marriages in English to a woman from Pakistan/Bangladesh, how will that make her feel? Men and women need to see a reference point – in who we are, and the ethos of the organization and what it stands for...if someone came up to me who had no referent point to my culture, my religion and telling me how to react, what I need to be doing, of course, my back is going to go up and say no, I’m not going to do that.

Exemplifying the success of their strategy, she offers the following example:

There was a demonstration - Minister Ruth Kelley was saying that in order to function here you need to learn English – we don't disagree with that, but on the other hand, she was taking away funding for ESL classes. There was a demonstration to protest the funds being taken away; the predominance of people in this demonstration was Muslim women. Women want to educate themselves, women want to learn, they want to make things better for the next generation...[but want] change on their own terms (Interview 68).

Observing particular religio-cultural sensitivities, Munia highlights the importance of strategically selecting which cultural norms to destabilize. By doing so, I argue, British Asian Muslim women in the diaspora simultaneously acquiesce and skillfully reject imposed gendered constructions of their identity. For a favorable outcome, the architecture of women-only spaces, needs to manage bodies, and needs to reflect the face and values of its community members. As the director of the Sparkhill Women's Center (provides computer, ESL, and dressmaking classes to women), Farzana told me: "We have broken a lot of barriers with husbands and brothers who are allowing their women to come...they see me as one of them...I am not here to break homes" (Interview 47).

The following are two examples of women-only organizations developed as a community resource to advance the position of its women, which illuminate the ways South Asian British Muslim women are extending the boundaries that were previously unavailable. Both demonstrate an unfurling access to public space. First is the Saheli, an adventure hub for women, founded by Naseem Akhthar. In her words:

Saheli is to provide opportunities in sport, leisure and recreation for women who have not had previous opportunities like these; for women to be engaged, empowered and involved in their communities.

In my generation it was acceptable for girls to have the life of home and school and school and home. I thought the next generation would have the all the opportunities that I didn't. But I realized after I turned double their age, pass thirty-two thirty-three, I realized that their life was no different than when I was a teenager. So really this

great opportunity and potential in being in England has not been realized - So that I got involved with Saheli.

We started taking girls rock-climbing, skiing, canoeing, biking etc... In the first year, thirteen girls - learned to ride a bike for the first time. Through these activities, we got them involved community consultation meetings, local ward meetings – where there were loads of men giving their views on behalf of women – so we started getting girls engaged in that process.

The center is in the local college – we have had women who now come into the gym are also now taking courses to gain new skills. As a result, the college, to reflect our gym, has become a women's-only facility. They realized by having a women-only ethos, they have had more and more women come in and train (Interview 11).

Zakia, a development officer for the Saheli group elaborates on its empowerment approach:

We [Saheli] have built up a trust relationship with the parents. We pick them [the girls] up and drop them off. We do the activity as stated. The parents know who will be there; the volunteers are female who will look after their daughters, and the activity is educational. The all-female environment is controlled, even if there is a male instructor (for skiing, for example), the parents know we will watch the girl (Interview 16).

The second example is the Bordesley Center of Further and Higher Education, a woman--only college. In partnership with City College and Birmingham University, it offers an “academic environment for students who want to gain further qualifications, develop new skills or retake exams.”⁷³ Sonia, an employment and training advisor at the Bordesley Center expands on her role:

My role is to encourage women and their families that the education system is here not to divert your children but rather give your children a foundation. Whatever else happens here is not a result of the education system, but due to other forces.

The role of this center in educating women – it is the first stepping stone - If I sent these women in a normal college they would not survive because they come from backgrounds of deprivation, from

⁷³ See their website for details: <<http://www.muathtrust.com>>

back home, some have never been to schools, never stepping in a classroom, not knowing the rules they would never survive and never have the confidence to return back. Whereas, here they know it is a community atmosphere – they know so and so from next door is here. They can go together. They know there will be some fun. We have some cultural activities here. They know they can pray here. They know they can wear niqab here without being penalized.

These women have attained degree-levels, and then have gone out in the community and found work and now giving back.

The attraction of this center is that it follows an Islamic ethos. They can practice their religion freely. The scare factor in a normal college is to be penalized for wearing the niqab or hijab and that the way they can dress.

Also, they can get permission from their parents. I have a client, who had never been educated, never worked and wandered in. She wanted to work, but her family did not believe in the education system because it had failed them before. So we had a family session and showed them around. The result was that mother enrolled in an ESL class, and she enrolled in classes and found work. The women are from the local community who are predominantly Muslim. Now we have non-Muslims also enrolling, especially adult-learners. They appreciate that it is a women-only environment. These women usually have faced deprivation or domestic violence. They have lost their confidence in men (Interview 9).

What is noticeably distinct about Saheli and Bordesley Center is the way it reconciles the paradox of movement in the public sphere with the social convention of segregation, which regulates the private. I encountered religious study groups within the home, but I argue that these groups function within normalized assumptions about women and home. The women-only spaces that I speak about utilize public institutions, albeit in a parallel plane to mixed-gender settings, without destabilizing religio-cultural sensibilities.

What is problematic about carving women-only spaces is that women are still subject to boundaries. Operating within same-sex sites are the underpinnings of hegemonic masculinity. In the case of Bordesley Center, for example, the imperative is still to maintain insularity. There

might be considerable autonomy for women within the space, but outside its walls, control of space and movement belong to men, and there are no real shifts of authority. I will make the argument, however, that these small-scale contestations lead to what I call “incremental empowerment,” whereby women are able to intervene at a psychological level. Many of my respondents spoke of the need to disable the community coherence that can insulate female minors from education and continue systemic cultural practices of marrying cousins and forced marriages. These projects, they contend, will enable women with confidence and a level of support and encouragement to extend their lived experiences beyond marriage, motherhood and home and to splinter the strict divide between public and private.

Deconstructing Culture:

With the increased social, educational and economic participation of women, there is also an intensified re-examination of the social and cultural capital that inserts itself into their community narrative. British Asian Muslim women in the diaspora are asking: “Why are we not able to further our education or permitted to work? Why is there an emphasis on early marriage? And moreover, “What discourse lends itself to these restrictions?” Alongside pragmatic community development initiatives, these women are additionally responding to the complex ideological underpinnings that authorize women’s subjacent position in British Muslim diasporic politics. Returning to my earlier discussion about religion and culture, the general viewpoint, in conversations with women in this study, is that Islam and cultures from the Indian subcontinent are inextricably linked together, and thus religion presents itself along geo-local lines: “There is a push and push towards Islam and culture; people say it is Islam when it is culture” (Nazneen, Interview 18). The women I interviewed reproach the gender iniquities in culture, and in contrast, praise the equality of men and women in Islam. Rukhsana, a forty-nine years-old

psychotherapist, attributes the failings of the community primarily to the cultural “man-made” flavor of Islam. Growing up, there was “great confusion” as to what was Islam and what were traditions rooted in the Indian sub-continent. In her capacity as a community chaplain, she does not “promote Pakistaniness,” and instead, advocates for a kind of Islamic knowledge intended to liberate women. Rukhsana expresses disbelief at how entrenched “man-made cultures” are among “third-generation British Pakistanis, who were brought up here.” Her counsel utilizes Qu’ranic verse and Hadith to advise against practices ranging from forced marriage, to permitting women to swim and play sports. Her endeavor is to:

equip women who have been brought up here, with Islam. They will see that Islam promotes liberty. Through liberty, they will be able to continue their education and even go to university, that wasn’t in the same city as their parents. They would become lawyers, doctors, whomever they want to be – they will have the ammunition – they can see the balance in Islam (Interview 63).

Emerging from Rukhsana’s work is what I would describe as a blueprint of the underpinnings of Islamic feminism. First, we see how interrogation of systems of knowledge can be effectively mobilized to challenge religio-cultural patriarchy and inform gender reform. Second, we see how the diasporic condition, more specifically, lends itself in this effort to move from Islamic feminism as a theoretic exercise to Islamic feminism in practice. I contend the state of diaspora, in particular, enables women to shape alternative gendered identities in contrast to their parents. While constructions of British and/or Asian identities are fluid, religious associations are more constant and coherent. The following response highlights the negotiation women undertake to produce complex forms of belonging in the diaspora:

In my late twenties, I could not draw on my Pakistani identity because it was the cause of my difficulties. I could not draw on my Britishness because then I would lose my Pakistani culture and my family. This led to my religion...Religion has been a constant (Batul, Interview 5).

By choosing not reproduce their parents' cultural stories, and re-inscribing their own diasporic identity with religion, British, Asian, Muslim women are articulating new ways of resisting exclusionary narratives.

Prioritizing their Islamic identity over maintaining cultural integrity, many of the women I interviewed minimize their cultural distinctions, and instead, revitalize the notion of the Muslim ummah. The genesis of the movement originated in universities. Many of the women permitted to continue their education were expected to limit their scope of study only to theology (thought to be appropriate for women, and not at odds with religio-cultural values). In their religious study circles, the women developed an understanding of Islam through a different lens. Aware of cultural contradictions, they started to practice their faith on what they believe is a "purely ideological level" (Bayan, Interview 13). Similar to the women described in the article "Feminisms, Islamophobia, and Identities,"⁷⁴ they create the "feminist face of Islamism" (2005, 267). By embracing the "transnationality of the ummah," they are able to evade the traditional demands placed by ethnic groups (2005, 268). The development of the ummah as a political space gives religious license to create a feminist political religious identity and to erase the singular voice of cultural conservatism.

I should say that while I name the following projects as "feminist," or more specifically, "Islamic feminist," many women in my study consciously distance themselves from such weighty labels. Derivatives of feminism evoke mistrust and rebuke from members of the Asian migrant community, and accordingly, my collaborators choose not to define their work. They are wary of collapsing the "issues of white feminism" with the challenges in their community.

⁷⁴ The authors consider the "life experiences of Muslim women in West Yorkshire and the strategies that they have forged to deal with problems" (Haleh Afshar, Rob Aitken, and Myfanwy Franks. "Feminisms, Islamophobia and Identities." *Political Studies*, 53, 2005), 263.

Arguing that a white feminist framework is “culturally skewed, western and secular,” they map their work along a different frame. The issues that shape their agenda do not necessarily reflect the issues white feminists want to defend: “taking off hijab, female genital mutilation, domestic violence and polygamy” (Humera, Interview 34). Zainab,⁷⁵ fifty-one years old British-Pakistani, founder of Muslim Women’s Network, draws out the distinction:

Western women’s lib is about rejection, what they need to do is negotiate. When a Muslim woman says she needs to go to work she should give quotations in Islam...a western woman would do it because it is her right. A Muslim woman can reference Islam - because Islam and culture is used to suppress you by the community and husband) - you can use it to challenge barriers...the knowledge of Islam should be used as a tool to negotiate. If you use women’s lib language, it will be used against you. It [Islam] is less confrontational, it is a bargaining tool...I am just trying to mediate through peaceful means – they don’t see me as a threat that is coming in and breaking up families (Interview 32).

Nevertheless, I suggest that my interviewees are employing the tools of Islamic feminism to reach their stated goals, and as such, closely resemble an Islamic feminist framework. As a Flourishing Neighborhood Coordinator, Rabina works to create opportunities for “family learning” at a local elementary school. By challenging culture and “taking the religious route,” she encourages mothers to attend school alongside their children, and “gain accreditation for certain courses.” She believes that Islam does not prohibit women from participating in all aspects of life (Interview 12).

Similarly, on the grounds of an inclusive Islam, Ravina (Interview 8) founded the first Muslim Scouts in Birmingham. As part of her youth work, to allow young girls to join her scout activities, she seeks permission for them by showing the male members of their families examples from the Qu’ran and from Islamic history which tell a different gendered story than

⁷⁵ Zainab is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #32.

what they contend. Also, attempting to re-tell the Islamic “feminist” story is “Muslimah in Action,” a Birmingham city council funded community group, which is a government initiative designed to “reach the ordinary Muslim woman.” Included in their materials is a “curriculum package for eighteen to twenty-six years old Muslims, entitled ‘Inspiring Muslim Women’.” The imperative is to build and inspire women’s Islamic knowledge by providing accounts of “Muslim women role models” in Islamic history (Interview 49-50). For my collaborators, it is about re-educating the Muslim community about discursive traditions. Identifying herself as a British Muslim, Noor⁷⁶ appropriates a British tradition, afternoon tea, to disseminate religious knowledge. Preferring “something very British,” she holds informal events like afternoon tea and flower arranging for young Muslim women to talk about “modern marriage, contraception...giving them a real modern viewpoint about Islam...something that is accessible and where they can ask questions” (Interview 71).

Operating at a more formal level, An-Nisa Society, a national organization, also seeks to challenge authoritarian structures of power in the public space. An-Nisa Society is a:

women managed organization working for the welfare of Muslim families. It was established in 1985 by a group of young Muslim women. For more than two decades, the Society has led the way in promoting a British Muslim identity, developing ground breaking faith based projects and working to create a greater understanding of the multi-ethnic Muslim community (An-Nisa Society, www.an-nisa.org).

In an interview Humera Khan, founder of An-Nisa, speaks of her campaign against the cultural manifestation of religion and the desire to mainstream faith within a British cultural framework. For her, An-Nisa is an “opportunity to set-up a space to re-negotiate who we are, and what we are” (Interview 34). She elucidates the British Muslim women’s experience:

⁷⁶ Noor is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #71.

Muslim cultural environment is basically sexist. Young British Muslim women who have grown up here are not into feminism...they want to work within an Islamic framework. Marriage and family life are important for them but they are finding increasingly within the Muslim cultural framework, there is a level of chauvinism they are struggling with. As they become more aware of religion, the more they become aware that men are behaving in a way that is not appropriate (Interview 34).

To address the vulnerabilities of women, who are British and Muslim, An-Nisa situates itself between the “narrow-mindedness of the community and the narrow-mindedness of the government” (Interview 34).

Members of An-Nisa, a self-professed grassroots community project, see themselves working within a framework that accepts Islam as their point of reference, “within the realities of lives of where we live,” not as spectators in the community. To confront problems in the community, An-Nisa argues that it needs to “operate on a preventive, proactive basis,” where issues it engages within a discourse that changes the behavior of Muslim individuals and families. Humera opines: “You have to work within the community you are part of, you have to show people the way to live a different life” (Interview 34). An- Nisa is a move towards creating “a springboard for a new evolving Muslim culture”, where parental cultural identities play a lesser role in their lives in Britain. For example, dissatisfied with the way mosques were handling religious education,⁷⁷ An-Nisa set up a supplementary school which was child-centered, involving activities such as singing, drawing drama, and acting. Another project is their “Cycle of Life” publications on Islam and sexual health, which offer uncomplicated guides to the “basic

⁷⁷ Respondents spoke of attending mosques after school. Generally, children are sent after school, for two hours every day to memorize the Qu’ran. It is an exercise of rote memorization. The practice continues among second and third generation parents today. Interviewee, Shamim tells me, for example, she sends “her children to the mosque everyday...to learn the basics, Qu’ran, *namaz* (prayers) and Urdu (an ethnic language)” (Interview 45). She acknowledges her daughter will have to stop attending the mosque once she starts getting her period. Her comments exemplify how entrenched cultural misconceptions are in the religious framework of the community.

factors which relate to marriage and good sexual health for Muslims from an Islamic perspective” (An-Nisa Society, 1997). Booklets on “Marriage,” and “Women,” for example, offer renewed understandings of marriage, issues and surrounding misconceptions and issues relating to the holistic health of Muslim women according to the teachings of Islam. The political performance of An- Nisa Society and others that share its views animates that way Islamic feminism can function in communal struggle for voice, space and identity. The assertion of “Muslim” identity subverts cultural professions of female inferiority. Counter-weighting cultural authority with a return to an unadulterated Islam can permit entrance to a new discursive public space for women.

Chapter three takes its cue from this discursive move to re-construct an alternative to what the women in my study see as a fortified communal cultural narrative, to in addition, find ways to contest British public narratives, which are also value-laden and serves to further the construction of a monolith British, South Asian, Muslim woman.

Chapter 3 - The (Re)presentation of the Female Muslim Self in British Knowledge Production.

While the findings in the preceding chapter address gender discrimination at what might be characterized at an internal local level, the women in my study, additionally, are resisting stereotypes external to their community. Consider the following example: It is Christmas day, December 25, 2006, and on the BBC (British Broadcasting Channel) network, the Queen is broadcasting her annual Christmas day speech to the British public. On Channel Four, in contrast, a fully veiled (wearing niqab) Muslim woman is delivering Channel Four's alternative Christmas speech.⁷⁸ Khadija, a recent convert to Islam, brings to her mind her suffragist great-grandmother, and speaks about shared British values of peace and tolerance, calls for the media to present moderate "Muslim" views, and briefly comments on wearing the niqab. Her message comes after the year in which Jack Straw, former foreign secretary and leader of the House of Commons, suggested that fully veiled Muslim women impede community relations, contribute to segregation, and are a barrier to integration.⁷⁹ While some viewers derided the network's choice of presenter,⁸⁰ others applauded the controversial pick. In both instances, however, I argue that

⁷⁸ Since 1993, Channel Four broadcasts an "Alternative Christmas Message" featuring a contemporary, often controversial, celebrity delivering an alternative to the Queen's broadcast on Christmas day.

⁷⁹ BBC News reports that Jack Straw's comments reinforced the support for niqab within the Muslim community. Citing Nadeem Siddiqui, owner of the Hijab Center, in the MP's constituency of Blackburn, more veils were sold after than before Jack Straw made his controversial remarks. Siddiqui stated: "I used to sell two or three a week, but now I am selling five to six. They are mainly being bought by young, British-born Muslim women. These women are experimenting with the wearing of the niqab. Their mothers often do not cover themselves but they seem to want to do it" (Nasreen Suleaman. "How veil remarks reinforced its support." BBC News, November 5, 2006, online edition. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/6117480.stm>

⁸⁰ The following are some illustrative quotes from the C4 blog: "Why should a Muslim give a Christian speech. It is a Christian celebration. No wonder Muslims are becoming more and more detested. She should have refused to do it and would if she had any integrity at all" (Karl Jones) "C4 Blog." Last modified October 6, 2006. Accessed December 9, 2006. <<http://www.mpacuk.org/content/view/3108>>. "I hate the idea of having to watch a muslim nobody who has been given a TV slot on C4 just by

false debates about integration, secularism and multiculturalism are written on her veiled body. Notwithstanding the network's motivation for shock value (Is a woman in a nun's habit equally contentious?), the incendiary reactions to the jarring image do, for example, highlight the tension between the majority and the minority Muslim population in Britain. The juxtaposition of a Muslim woman giving a Christmas speech on a Christian holiday, further intensifies questions of religious visibility, belongingness and the place of religion in secular public space. Moreover, it additionally places accusations of traditionalism and growing Islamic revivalism squarely on the shoulders of abject Muslim women or the men, who insist "their women" dress with religious import. Reinforcing the perception of an increased "foreign" presence in Britain, the trope of Khadija and her full veil is a useful mechanism to elaborate the polarizing distinctions between secular Britain and practicing Islam. I argue that her (re)presented self, offered by the media, serves the ideological and political ends of others in public space, and she has yet to tell her own story.

In this chapter I take up this issue. Holding the media accountable for political machinations: i.e., manipulating and maneuvering images to express a specific point of view, my research collaborators generally voiced concern, skepticism and anger towards what they perceive to be Eurocentric secular media. The criticism is the British media's promotion of anti-Muslim/Islamic rhetoric counter to a backdrop of white hegemony, which results in reinforcing unequal social inequalities by constructing a sense of "us" versus "them," "citizen" versus "foreign immigrant" and the "west" and "Other."

The media is a 'bad thing.' The news is edited. It is anti-Islam.
After the July bombings, the road in my community was closed

REFUSING to take off a rag. What's wrong with this bloody country? We'll be giving Bin Laden his own channel on) primetime ENGLISH television next" (Georgi Decan) "C4 Blog." Last modified October 6, 2006. Accessed December 22, 2006. <<http://www.mpacuk.org/content/view/3108>>.

off. The media chose ‘In’nit’[isn’t it] boys and men to interview. They could have chosen someone who spoke more eloquent but they chose rude boys on the street who chat rubbish, who talk about violence...feeds into your mind at a subconscious level. The headlines are sensational (Shaheen, Interview 4).

Media plays the main part in creating the image of Muslims... that we are terrorists or if someone has their veil on ‘they have their ninja costume on’ (Maria,⁸¹ Interview 15).

Media has hurt Muslims...they pick on women, tell them they can’t wear veil. You can go to school with dreadlocks but you can’t go with hijab, it is not right is it? (Tania,⁸² Interview 21)

Views of television: it is rubbish, nothing useful. Documentaries with regards to Islam are pitched in a narrow-minded view. For example, Dispatches - very quickly points fingers at Muslims and paints Muslims as terrorists or as enemies. But in the past, IRA, has never been labeled as a faith-based terror group, but with Muslims the stance is that ‘they are Muslims’...that causes a different type of phobia or fear in the community (Rukhaya,⁸³ Interview 26)

While media analysis is not a new research endeavor, and a number of scholars have written extensively on media representations of Muslims in the Britain,⁸⁴ I place mainstream media in my research simply because it is a key site of cultural power where exclusionary politics play out in Britain, and I believe it continues to reinforce social boundaries between Muslims and the non-Muslim majority population. However, my point of focus differs in two ways. Firstly, my findings on the ground reveal the significance of media interpretation in my interviewee’s lives. The public media, they contend, approaches the representation of Muslims negatively, and is

⁸¹ Maria is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #15.

⁸² Tania is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #21.

⁸³ Rukhaya is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #26.

⁸⁴ See the works of Haifaa Jawad and Tansin Benn, eds. *Muslim Women in the United Kingdom and Beyond: Experiences and Images*. (2003); Sarita Malik, *Representing Black Britain: Black and Asian Images on Television*. (2002); Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*. (2002);, John E. Richardson, *(Mis)Representing Islam: The Racism and Rhetoric of British Broadsheet Newspapers*. (2004)

helping create conditions whereby it reproduces racist meanings and affirms racial, religious and ethnic discrimination against Muslims in the public space. Taking this idea further, I believe such media representations hint at the fractured relationship between the state and the Muslim community. Accordingly, I highlight the ways in which such negative media images impact the inclusive/exclusive relationship the women in my study have with the larger British public and state, thereby determining to what extent they are willing to collaborate and/or challenge religio-cultural readings of gendered traditions within their cultural community. Secondly, I argue, it is the uncritical representation of Muslim women in the media that largely contributes to the reconstruction of a (re)presented category of “Muslim Women,” a category I believe they are now defining on their own terms. These women are moving beyond memorializing traditions and fixed definitions assigned by others (internal and external), to express a current sense of who they believe to be themselves.

Studying media from the British perspective requires attention to “Islamophobia,” which most would argue contributes to a discourse of exclusion and is a precursor to the self-segregation (physical and ideological) of Muslims in Britain. Islamophobia is a neologism popularized in the Runnymede Trust⁸⁵ report published in 1997. To remind readers, Islamophobia is an abstract discursive ideology which emphasizes the bifurcation between Islam and the West, and is defined as an “unfounded hostility towards Islam.” Further, the report points “to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs” (quoted in Richardson 2004, 21). Ostensibly, Islamophobia fosters the very kind

⁸⁵ Runnymede Trust is an independent race equality think tank. It generates intelligence to promote a “multi-ethnic Britain through research, network building, leading debate, and policy engagement” <<http://www.runnymedetrust.org>> 20 October 2011.

of discrimination that current Race Relations legislation fails to redress. For the purpose of this chapter, Islamophobia is primarily expressed through mass-communicated media.

Media outlets, emphasizing two cultural camps with competing philosophies: “British” and “Non-British/Immigrant/Muslim” deploy particular tropes in service of this divisive ideology, upon which “governmental policies and social practices are framed” (Sheehi 2001, 31). In this regard, I consider John Richardson’s “ideological square 1” (2004, 75), where the author argues the media partake in placing social values on both metaphorical spaces (British and Muslim). It characterizes Muslim social space, for example, as having distinguishing traits such as inferiority, negativity, archaic un-Western traditions, and for our purposes, gender inequality. The Muslim minority often accuses the media of overlooking voices of moderation, wrongly associating religious practices with the perceived subjugation of all Muslim women, and broadly disparaging Islam as backward and anti-feminist. The media, I argue, mimics a neo-Orientalist design and sanctions Islam as spectacle characterizing it with an ensemble cast of terrorists, fundamental reactionaries, and women in full veils.

If one accepts that one cannot disassociate cultural meanings in the media from its consequential effects in lived real life, the media’s responses to the “Muslim question” are useful indicators of the current political and social climate of the public space. Significantly, there is an obvious impact by the British media industries on the public sector; the media continue to contribute to the existing uneasy relationship between the state and the British Muslim community. I argue that the state has appropriated the media’s homogenous, uni-dimensional campaign of what it means to be a Muslim woman. I put this point to Baroness Manzila Uddin. Of Bangladeshi descent, Baroness Manzila Uddin is a British Labour Party politician, and the first Muslim woman in the House of Lords. Commenting on her challenges in politics, she laments:

The state [Britain] is confused about what is the ideal Muslim and Asian woman. At the moment the world sees a woman who is veiled or hijab as not the ideal...the state wants you to reflect its own opinions...the Muslim woman would find it difficult to fit into the state's idea of an acceptable face (Interview 64).

I should note that this cross-current of ideas between the state, media and the British Muslim community runs in both directions. The British Muslim community holds its own parochial version of what the state represents. For example, the decision to join the police force brings hostile criticism for Samah.⁸⁶ She is accused of being a “pig,” and threatened with mortal “hell” (Interview 6). I make mention of Samah to highlight first how distrust is brokered between the state and British Muslim community, and second, to demonstrate how communal sensibilities reaffirm contrasting identities between the two, and set them firmly into place. In her interview, Shazia⁸⁷ explains the rationale: “It is a defense mechanism...when your religion is under attack in the media and by the government...you run to it [religion] and want to assert it” (Interview 23). The intended or unintended outcome of this flawed prism of representation is that both the state and the British Muslim community are finding themselves at odds with each other's edited characterizations. Therefore, to situate my research within the British landscape, it is necessary to perform a critical discourse study of media representations of Muslim men and women and of portraits of the Muslim community as a whole, to see the role media plays in the production and reproduction of xenophobia, anti-Muslim racism, and the articulation of gendered Muslim identity in Britain. I survey the “British Muslim” experience by identifying and exploring the ways media produces and communicates representations of British Muslim women. Specifically, central to this research is the public mapping of cultural, religious and social identity on British

⁸⁶ Samah is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #6.

⁸⁷ Shazia is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #23.

South Asian Muslim women's bodies in the name of 'progress'/'liberation' or 'tradition'/'oppression.'

By analyzing the images of Muslim women that circulate in public space, I explore how modes of representations can renew tensions between Muslims and the West, and further the ethnic and religious homogenization within the British Muslim imagination. I start this project with the belief that the concentrated negative mainstream media portrayal of Muslim women impacts the (re)presentation of the Muslim self, and the resulting consequence paradoxically is an inclination within the South Asian Muslim minority community to remain steadfast in their uncritical acceptance of a traditional narrative, in particular, with respect to women. This is also in large part owing to the fact the images of the Muslim minority focus uniquely on South Asian ethnicity, in contrast to the pervasive Arab-centric representations in the US, and therefore, members of the South Asian community are more likely to see mirror representations of themselves. Concluding this chapter, however, I provisionally revise the idea that conflict is taking place between tradition/Islam and modernity/West. Instead, I present ways my research subjects are innovating novel forms of resistance to internal and external discrimination by transforming the media environment to contain new possibilities of consumption.

To this end, during the period of July 2007-July 2008, and then briefly in January 2010, I sampled for this study domestic newspaper coverage (the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph*, the *Sun*, the *Independent*, and the *Times*), television programming, including film drama, news and documentaries, on Britain's leading network channels (BBC, ITV, Channel Four, Channel Five), and the production of Muslim minority media (The Islam Channel, *Emel* magazine, Unity FM). I focused primarily on articles or television shows which identified an individual Muslim woman or the subject of the text, or where the program was about Islam and/or Muslim related, mostly

specific to women. By analyzing daily print and television programming, I was able to use the information as a tool to bridge the conversation between my collaborators and myself. More often than not, the women in my study would react to local television shows or articles, and it was helpful for me to understand their passing reference. Additionally, for a first-person perspective, I interviewed women who are currently working as journalists, producers, and editors in mainstream and minority Muslim media.

Approaching the beginning of my analysis broadly, I found an extensive selection of published newspaper articles and television broadcast programs focused on South Asian stories. In the month of August 2007 alone, BBC aired “India and Pakistan, 07,” a series of programs on television and radio to mark the sixtieth anniversary of independence from British rule of India and Pakistan. Ranging from dramas, documentaries to travelogues, the BBC included in its offerings: historical “then and now” portraits, modern-day travel shows hosted by British Asian television personalities, and content programming exploring the implications of Independence, subsequent immigration and the formation of the immigrant psyche.⁸⁸ “Midnight’s Grandchildren,”⁸⁹ for example, is a documentary in “which three British teenagers whose families came from India and Pakistan return there sixty years after the partition that accompanied independence...and meet the communities their families left behind and discuss how the legacy informs their own sense of identity” (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007v78x). Sharing a similar theme, in March 2008, BBC further explored race, racism and identity in

⁸⁸ The following are included in the BBC series: *Karachi Uncovered*, where the host, actor Atta Yaqub, returns to “modern” Pakistan to challenge his preconceptions, and confront his desire to distance himself from Pakistani culture and “outdated traditions;” In *Crossing the Border*, comic Hardeep Singh Koli travels the “subcontinent’s borders;” on BBC Asian network, Asian Nation, a radio program, explores key issues affecting the “Asian community in Britain today” <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/asiannetwork>> August 10, 2007.

⁸⁹ The title is a play based on Salman Rushdie’s novel, *Midnight’s Children* (1980), which is a book about India’s transition from British colonialism to Independence.

multicultural Britain with its “White Season,” asking the question: “Is white working class Britain becoming invisible?” (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/white/>). In this series of programs,⁹⁰ BBC, marking the anniversary of Enoch Powell’s “Rivers of Blood Speech” (1968),⁹¹ examines the white working class in Britain, and looks at their feelings of marginalization against a backdrop of increased immigration and ethnic diversity within the British population.

Inflected by this complex history of colonialism, immigration, and recent vilification of the Muslim population, Channel Four and Five also take on the South Asian cultural community. “My New Home,” for example, is an annual documentary that follows the lives of three immigrant children in the UK. “Angry Young Men” is a four week reality program on Channel Four which follows Amir Khan, a British Muslim Asian boxer as he mentors young, violent offenders to transform their lives, and “channel their aggression into sport, supported by a close family life and the moral values of organized religion” (*The Times*, Aug. 21, 2007). Print media, as well, join in the investigation of issues of identity and belonging. On November 30, 2004, the *Guardian* printed a series of articles entitled “Young, Muslim and British.” Their objective was to “eavesdrop” on the “set of issues being debated within a new generation of British Muslims,” and present “voices rarely heard” to their “non-Muslim readership.”⁹² There is an unmistakable resolve by media to address multicultural politics, and elaborate themes such as integration, segregation, and assimilation of ethnic minorities in Britain. Through this panoptic lens, I argue, media coverage fortifies political and social criticism of the failure of immigrants, particularly

⁹⁰ The following are included in the series: *Rivers of Blood*, which explores the impact of Enoch Powell’s speech; *White Girl*, which tells the story of a young white girl and her working class family who moves to a Muslim Asian community in Bradford; and *The Primary*, a documentary following a group of ethnically diverse children for a school term in Birmingham.

⁹¹ See page 21 of this paper for details on Powell’s speech.

⁹² Madeleine Bunting. “Young, Muslim and British,” *The Guardian*. November 30, 2004, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2004/nov/30/islamandbritain.madeleinebunting>> October 6, 2008.

Asian Muslims, to integrate into British society. By drawing out distinctions between self-identifications and counter-identifications, and by asking whether immigrants reflect British values, the media reinforce dominant public opinion that, first, ethnic minorities are the “Other,” and accordingly, can undermine British identity. The media construct the British self as an insider, in opposition to those outside on the margins. Second, by complicating the question of home for second and third generation British-born minorities, and contrasting it to the viewpoint of white Britain, the media casts public doubt about the Muslim minority’s loyalty to British citizenship. Last, specifically focusing on British Asian Muslims, the media rely upon what Dunn and Kamp label, “static generalizations” (2009, 47) promoting a homogenous understanding of Islam and Muslims, ignoring internal differences.

Narrowing my search criteria through a focused gendered lens, I collected a corpus of data to reveal four sets of imagery associated with the “Muslim Woman” (an essentialist category in itself) that circulate in mainstream media-- images manufactured for cultural and political consumption: Oppressed, Militant, Enlightened Secular, and a small group of images of what I call, the Empowered Muslim woman. I discuss these in some detail in the following sections.

Muslim Woman as Oppressed

The view of Muslim woman as oppressed has gained currency through the ubiquitous image of the veiled Muslim woman. The all too familiar Muslim woman covered, by a niqab or not, is a central trope in articulation of the “Islam- as-inferior” thesis. For the consumer, the centrality of the hijab indicates the “Muslim-ness” of the thematic content. Moreover, whether, in material form or abstract concept, the very idea of hijab attempts to draw out distinctions between group identity subjectivities--gendered constructions of a normative British identity in

contrast to that of a disempowered other. Within this terrain of images and texts, most often, the Muslim woman is behind the veil to illustrate her symbolic silence. She often plays a role on the sidelines, placed there to highlight the metaphorical difference in the “us” versus “them” discursive narrative. For example, on February 11, 2008, in the *Daily Mail*, accompanying a two page article condemning “Muslim cousin marriages...within families originating from rural Pakistan” (Brooke et al. 2008), and the associated health risks to children born of those marriages, is a photo of two unidentified women in Birmingham, clad in their *burqas* (loose black robe covering women’s face, with a small opening for the eyes and women’s body, head to toe). The women are neither identified nor quoted for the article. Instead, they are fixed in time, with no voice as they quietly lend their de-contextualized bodies in service of the paper’s desire to sensationalize the story, undoubtedly suggesting that “in-breeding” is wholly related to the lives of all Muslim women, who most likely have been forced to marry their first cousins.

In this “oppressed” category, taking cues from Orientalist, Western feminist and nationalist narratives, promoting a “process of representational essentializing...in which one part or aspect of peoples’ lives come to epitomize them as a whole” (Clifford, 1992, 100), visual and textual media continue to affirm false universalities about Muslim women, and the community in general. Echoing Chandra Mohanty’s (1991) discursive production of the singular “Third World Woman,” the Muslim woman as oppressed presupposes all Muslim women as a homogenous group; ignorant, illiterate and victims of both symbolic and violent patriarchal control.⁹³

⁹³ Scholars such as Sondra Hale in “The Politics of Gender in the Middle East.” In *Gender and Anthropology: Critical Reviews for Research and Teaching*. Sandra Morgen, ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1989), 246-267; and Suad Joseph in “Gender and Citizenship in Middle Eastern States” *Middle East Report* (January-March 1996), 4-9, offer a searching analysis of the role of gender stereotypes in constructing notions of citizenship.

Illustrating this category of Muslim women as oppressed are two examples I came across in my research from print and television. First, on July 21, 2007, both the *Times* and the *Guardian*, published articles reporting the sentencing of three men (father, uncle, and cousin) who were convicted for the honor killing of their daughter/niece (Banaz Mahmood), whom they believed “had shamed their family by falling in love.” According to *the Times*, the men “tortured, raped and murdered [her] to restore ‘honour’ on their family name and serve a lesson to women in their community”⁹⁴ (25). Accompanying the article in the *Guardian*⁹⁵ is a close-up photo of Banaz’s sister behind the protection of a black burqa, with only her eyes visible. Taken on their own, the articles are reporting merely on a crime and its consequence. However, I suggest that there are wider implications. There is a subtle accusation aimed at the Muslim community at large. Underscoring the offender’s account of the crime is a strong notion of gendered territory that needs to be defended against the threat of Western values. By emphasizing that the offence was “designed to carry out a wider message to the community” (9), I argue that the writers construct the crime as no longer exceptional, but rather normalize the killing within the offender’s ethnic community, as if the Muslim community accepts violence uncritically as a justified measure of control when women violate cultural norms, and bring disrepute to themselves, family and community. By testifying to both the inherent pathology in Muslim men without notes of exceptionalism, and further, re-asserting the passivity of Muslim women, who are subject to discipline from such men (point strengthened by including a photograph of the sister,) the articles continue to advance uncritically stock representations of Muslim men and women within public discourse.

⁹⁴ Steve Bird “Three men jailed for life over honour killing.” *The Times* 21 July 2007: 25.

⁹⁵ McVeigh. “Father and Uncle given life for ‘honour murder.’” *Guardian* 21 July 2007: 9.

The second example is the documentary “Divorce Sharia Style.”⁹⁶ Aired on Channel Four (March 2008), the film follows the workings of Shari’ah law in Britain, focusing on the theological implications and application of issues relating to an Islamic divorce: separation, custody and spousal support. With the introduction to the Shari’ah court at Regent’s Park, we get a glimpse into the private world of legal mediation. In an informal setting, religious authority offers spiritual albeit not legally binding advice to those seeking divorce. The majority of applicants are women who want to terminate their marriage. However, what we see is that despite their clients’ pain, anger and distress, the male sheikhs, holding roundtable discussions, are reluctant to sanction divorce, leaving the women appearing in the program in contentious marital relationships. The council, for example, advises Erum to give her husband a second chance, in spite of knowing her suicide attempt during the marriage. The media presents the viewing public an over-determined spectacle: documentary evidence of a repressive religion, villainous men, and women who are the passive victims of the nefarious Muslim men. The above examples simultaneously express the ways in which images of Muslim men and women operate hand in hand, oppressed and oppressor, representations co-existing in contingent relationships, one determined by the other.

It bears repeating that the women in the community under study do not self-identify as “oppressed.” Rather I appropriate the word from the center, where “oppressed” is a discursive identifier used to signify the ideological differences between white Britain and the Muslim minority, and where the media ascribes it unreservedly to Muslim women on the margins. There is an intentional effort by the media and by extension the state to feed into popular consciousness a particular portrait and story of gender relationships within the Muslim community

⁹⁶Masood Khan, Director, *Divorce Sharia Style*, 2008.

I had the opportunity to attend a taping of “The Big Questions,⁹⁷” a BBC television program which responds to the political, social and cultural debates taking place in Britain. Offering faith and non-faith perspectives, the show has a panel of four guests alongside the contributions from its studio audience. Prior to the taping, the producers asked us a set of questions about the proposed topic, and further, asked us to religiously identify ourselves so that we could be seated accordingly in the auditorium. During the show, one of the “big questions” centered on music and faith and in this regard, the host asked a Muslim musician his opinion about female singers. The Muslim musician professed proudly: “I wouldn’t allow my wife, mother or daughter to be one.” I take issue with the BBC producers on two fronts: first, the producers were aware of the studio audiences’ responses to the questions prior to the taping. We might see this as a purposeful move to allow him (the musician) uncensored airtime. Certainly the producers were mindful of the reactions his response would elicit. Second, I ask the question why was I not asked, as a Muslim woman, my opinions about music, women and Islam? I suggest that there is little interest in promoting the diversity of Muslim voices, and instead, there is media preference for sustaining public stereotypes concerning Muslim men and their social control of Muslim women. In response to such media stereotyping, I argue, Muslim minorities are resolute in defending “their” women, and accordingly, remain firmly entrenched within their camp.

Another related example is from “Love + Hate,⁹⁸” a BBC dramatic film which follows the interracial affair between a British-Pakistani Muslim girl and a white British boy in a working class town in northern England. In the following scene, two male factory-workers, a white man and a British-Pakistani man (Yousif) are talking about their plans for the weekend:

⁹⁷ BBC, “The Politics Show,” October 7, 2007.

⁹⁸ Dominic Savage, Director, *Love + Hate*, 2006.

White man: I can't understand why you can go out with white girls, yet we can't go out with your girls. You keep them under lock and key, don't you?

Yousif: Our women do what they want.

White man (in an incredulous tone): Walk ten paces back or something, do what they fucking want?

Yousif: They respect their bodies and they are not loose as white women.

White man: White women are not loose. Your women would be the same if you let them out from under lock and key. Anyways you should stick to your own. You should stick to yours, and we should stick to ours and never the twain should meet.

Dismissing each other's viewpoint, both men reveal their ideological bias, engaging in what I see as a formulaic campaign to assert their own distinctive ethnic/religious/cultural identity: defending the equality between gender relations by evoking strong notions of territoriality and writing the corresponding script on "their" women's body and behavior. Paradoxically, by constructing identity politics around binary oppositions of self and other and making women central to this narrative, it reinforces gender hierarchies in both cultural camps, and in turn, disempowers both groups of women.

Muslim Woman as Militant

Complementing the "oppressed" Muslim woman is her male companion: the hyperbolic Muslim radical terrorist. Masquerading as British, both threaten the Western project of "democracy," "freedom," and "equality." The media, "as an instrument of public ideology," (Poole, 2002) presupposes that both Muslim men and women as a pair are in a contentious relationship with the state with little affection for the British value system, and always maintaining a physical and ideological distance from the center. British television plays a significant role in reproducing this idea in the public psyche. Its programming is particularly

heavy-handed in its Muslim-focused offerings, and accordingly, as part of my fieldwork I was able to watch and record copious notes on a number of television programs. In the first instance, I look to Channel Four's investigative documentary series on current affairs, "Dispatches." On August 6, 2007, it aired a documentary entitled "Britain Under Attack."⁹⁹ The television program prompted the question: "Can British Muslims be loyal to their homeland and to their faith?" Through a series of interviews and news footage, the documentary presents the viewpoint that political Islam is source of radicalism and a threat to British national security. By suggesting that Islam and the West cannot coexist, the documentary reduces Muslim identity to one that cannot be British. A militant Muslim man in one scene, for example, unequivocally states: "Muslims in Britain should realize, we are in a state of war." Further, he provides theological justifications for the 7/7 bombings claiming Britain has not entered a covenant of security with Muslims.

Commenting specifically on the Dispatches documentaries on television, Rokhsana¹⁰⁰ opines:

The documentaries with regards to Islam are pitched in a narrow-minded view...very quickly pointing fingers at Muslims. It paints Muslims as terrorists or as enemies, but in the past, IRA has never been labeled as a faith-based terror group but with Muslims, the stance is 'they are Muslims', that causes a different type of phobia or fear in the community (Interview 26)

In another example, "Immigrants: The Inconvenient Truth,"¹⁰¹ aired on October 1, 2007, takes issue with multiculturalism and its desirous policy outcome. Citing the Somali Muslim refugee community as an example of an immigrant group that represent what most people fear about immigration," in large part because of unemployment and large families, the documentary raises the problem of both the physical segregation of immigrant groups, and the unseen "segregation of the mind," which the documentary defines as a collective mind-set that is

⁹⁹ "Britain Under Attack," *Dispatches*. Channel 4. August 6, 2007.

¹⁰⁰ Rokhsana is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #26.

¹⁰¹ "Immigrants: The Inconvenient Truth" *Dispatches*. Channel 4. October 1, 2007.

“opposed to the ideas and identities of the people of where they live,” and where their cultural point of reference lies somewhere else. Rallying around this “Powellian” point, the documentary validates the claim that importing immigrant cultures from abroad fragments British culture and country. To quote a white woman interviewed in the documentary: “Britain has forgotten about white Britain.” Developed in the wider context of current military actions, global migration and territorial displacement, by drawing continued negative attention to ethnic minority groups as the alien Other in Britain, “Dispatches” grounds itself into exclusionary notions of belonging and presents over-simplified boundaries of representation: inside/outside, us/them and good/evil.

The overarching narrative embodying the “threat within” is the subject of other television coverage as well. On BBC, the programming also contributes to this particular sensationalized/demonized image of Muslims in Britain. Additionally, it should be noted that BBC is state programming, and therefore, is reflecting state views on its own Muslim population. The types of stories, incidentally aired on the same night, include: “Inside a Shari’ah Court”¹⁰² and “How I Became a Muslim Extremist.”¹⁰³ While the latter documents the story of Shiraz Maher, a former “extremist” British Muslim and member of Hizb al-Tahrir, the former takes the issue of Sharia courts in Britain, and asks how Islamic law can work alongside British law. Giving consideration to Nigeria, the documentary analyzes both the success and shortcomings of religious and secular law operating in a modern-day setting. Framing the story around the central question, “Would women get justice in an Islamic court?” The documentary investigates litigation related to sexual offences, mandatory Islamic dress for women, and cases of domestic violence. As a discernible expression of media bias, the documentary offers a recognizable cast and plot: the male, autocratic face of the court, and the grievous consequence of this for women.

¹⁰² “Inside A Shari’ah Court,” *BBC This World*. BBC Two, October 1, 2007.

¹⁰³ “How I Became a Muslim Extremist.” *Panorama*. BBC One, October 1, 2007.

A rape victim, for example, can be charged with adultery in an Islamic court. Presenting Islamic dogma at its most orthodox, “Inside a Shariah Court” underscores the western moral imperative that Muslim women need rescue from Muslim men, and further, punctuates a spurious divide between Islam and the west. The hellion Muslim male remains the subject of focus in the Panorama documentary, “How I Became a Muslim Extremist.” Recounting his journey into ideological extremism, Shiraz Maher exposes the inner-workings of Hizb al-Tahrir, a political organization finding audiences in British mosques, universities and student groups. As part of its incendiary constitution, the separatist group seeks a religious revolution whereby it wants to create a global Islamic state, and implement a caliphate. Members demand loyalty to religion not nation, and urge young Muslims “not to feel British.” A friend of Maher, Khalid Ahmed, ultimately becomes the driver in the 2007 Glasgow Airport bombing. By portraying Muslim men through this prism of hate, violence and control, the media no longer practice objectivity, and instead, continue their uncensored fetishization of the Muslim male. Doing so, serves to pander to the audiences’ base-line organic fear of Muslims invading Britain, and reinforce government imperatives to manage publicly Muslim minorities.

Drawing on this societal fear, there is a recent surge of interest by the British media to expand its militant category to include Muslim women. The development of this new myth considers beyond the idea of oppression, and instead, implicates Muslim women, alongside men, in physical and ideological acts of aggression. Featuring in the media, the Muslim woman as militant is antithetical to the British way of life and signals a failure of multiculturalism. Almost always pictured with niqab, she articulates a message of radicalism, support of violence, and an incompatibility with a western moral mandate. For example, I look at the earlier cited documentary “Britain Under Attack.” For my purpose, a study of this documentary is valuable in

the way the bodies of Muslim women are presented. Interspersed throughout the program is camera footage of veiled Muslim women in public space. In one particular de-contextualized scene, women in niqab are shown protesting in the streets of Britain, with the commentator describing *al-Muhajiroun*, a banned organization that calls British Muslims to arms. To the viewing public, their bodily performance on the streets of Britain can be framed in terms of collusion with religious zealots, militant and/or domestic terrorists. The contributive effect, I argue, is a more cumulative conception of Muslims as threatening in Britain. While the central meaning of fully veiled women remains hinged to female oppression, this shift to include women in the “threat within” narrative is now “constructed as a deliberate refusal of the British way of life” (Khiabany, and Williamson 2001, 189). The imagery of Muslim woman as militant paints a decidedly new picture: Muslim men and women engaging in a cohesive, cooperative and violent moral unit distinct from the mores of ordinary Britain.

My use of “militant” in this category of characterization is not precise, and instead embodies different manifestations of the defined term. I refer to “Muslim woman as militant” in the media as a subject engaging in violent and aggressive warfare and/or reflecting a specific mind-set perceived by the West as intrinsically hostile, destructive, advocating hate, and incompatible with British or Western culture. Her militancy is almost always accessorized with Islamic dress. On July 10, 2007, for example, the *Daily Mail* printed a full- page story, with an accompanying photograph, headlining “Facing jail, juror whose hijab hid an MP3 player.”¹⁰⁴ The article details the account of a juror, twenty years old Rehela Khanom (described as “Muslim”) who was removed from a murder trial when she was caught listening to music with headphones hidden under her hijab. Khanom was held in contempt of court and will face probable prison

¹⁰⁴ Beth Hale and Colin Fernandez. “Facing jail, juror whose *hijab* hid an MP3 player.” *Daily Mail* 10 July 2007: 9.

time. To what degree is Khanom's crime noteworthy? While this was not a crime incited by religion, the writer peppers the article with associative words such as "Muslim" and "Islamic headgear" to suggest a relationship between her religious identity and the crime. The media impulse to pursue this story, I believe, is about the need to highlight British Muslims' perceived disaffection with the state. Quoting a court official: "In all the years I have served here I have never known anything like it. The woman was clearly laughing at the court and our system of justice" (9), the article gently reminds readers of the distinct difference between the Muslim community and the rest of the Britain: they (Muslims) do not share a common sense of civic responsibility or a shared sense of national belonging. By emphasizing "our system of justice," the writer draws out a discernible "us and them" divisive mind-set, where Khanom's crime is a larger attack on British institutions and societal values by Muslims.

Featuring prominently in this discursive approach are the visual images of veiled Muslim women almost always accompanying Muslim or Islamic identified articles in the press. These images are often unrelated to the content of the article and/or offer no contextual specificity. Shrouded in invisibility, her presence speaks for itself. By emoting a critical tone, the image hints at the reader the problematical nature of Islam in Britain. Speaking to this point, for example, on February 8, 2008, all major newspapers in Britain headlined the story of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, who came under attack for suggesting a place for Sharia law to operate alongside secular British law. Advocating for a "plural jurisdiction," Dr. Williams called for the selective accommodation of Shari'a in issues requiring private arbitration such as in resolving marital disputes.¹⁰⁵ Ranging from the *Guardian* and the *Times* to

¹⁰⁵ For a more in-depth analysis of the incident, please refer to Claire George's "'This Idiotic Man'" in *Pointing the Finger: Islam and Muslims in the British Media*. Julian Petley, and Robin Richardson, eds. (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2011), 201-220.

the *Daily Mail*, the articles in broad strokes present Williams's comments and the ensuing backlash. It is not surprising that the mere intimation that Shari'a law could possibly function in Britain was met publicly with hostility. Initiating a moral panic, the articles uniformly assert that Muslims engage in religio-cultural practices that will surely threaten British values and interests and therefore, any likeness to Shari'a law in Britain will be an ideological assault on Western principles. Quoting a critic, the *Daily Mail*, for example, writes: "There are aspects of Sharia that are practiced that we certainly would not want in this country. The laws in this country do not allow forced marriages or polygamy"¹⁰⁶ (February 11, 2008). In its article,¹⁰⁷ the *Daily Express* concludes:

The blunt truth is this: the increasing use of sharia courts by Islamic communities in Britain is unpatriotic and unacceptable to the majority of the public. Muslims who wish to be regarded as true Britons should cease this practice at once and accept the law of the land. Muslims who don't should go and find another country with a culture more to their taste (Feb 9, 2008).

Most notably (for this research), in a vitriolic charge against Williams, the headlining story in the *Sun*, printed in two-inch bold typeface letters is: "WHAT A BURKHA"¹⁰⁸(February 8, 2008). Accompanying the headline is a photograph with a woman clad in a burkha, giving a palm-back V sign (equivalent to the middle finger gesture in US) to the camera, with the caption reading: "Fury...woman in burkha." Inside the headline continues: "Victory for Terrorism." The article is ambiguous in terms of the relationship between veiled women and the accommodation of Shari'a in matters of familial law. By relying on interpretive judgments from the public, the combative posture of the woman serves as symbolic trope in the media's campaign to vilify Muslims in Britain. Embodying the male perspective, the image implicates her as indistinguishable from

¹⁰⁶ Jane Merrick, "Storm over Muslim." *Daily Mail*. 11 February 2008: 6

¹⁰⁷ "Sharia law cannot take place of British justice." *Daily Express* 9 February 2008: 14.

¹⁰⁸ George Pascoe-Watson, "What a Burkha." *The Sun*. 8 February 2008: 8-9.

Muslim men: supporting medieval legal punishments, polygamy, and violent extremism. She is now the monster invading peaceful, free Britain.

Turning my attention to fiction, filmmakers are taking their cues from newspaper and television coverage to include the militant Muslim woman as a central character in fictional dramas. Plotting stories against a backdrop of growing communal religious fundamentalism, viewers get a glimpse of a Muslim woman's slow descent into extremism. In the film "Yasmin"¹⁰⁹ (2005), the lead protagonist Yasmin is a young British-Pakistani woman struggling to reconcile her desire to assimilate in white British society with her obligation to family, religion and cultural traditions. Having lost her mother, duty-bound to her father, Yasmin is the principal caretaker of her father, brother and husband, whom she calls "Import." Victim of a forced marriage, Yasmin is waiting for Faysal, a recent Pakistani immigrant, to receive his British passport so that she can initiate divorce. In this psychological portrait, we see Yasmin endeavor to move (literally with the purchase of car, incidentally against her father's wishes, who believes "she will bring shame onto the family") between the margins of the Asian ghetto, where she lives and to the center of town, where she works. Describing herself as not a "TP-typical Paki," away from home, she wears western clothes, drinks on occasion, and flirts with a white male co-worker, only to make a thorough transformation to traditional before returning home. Further complicating the narrative are the events of 9/11. In the aftermath of 9/11, the film presents an anatomy of Yasmin's subtle psychic change starting with harassment at her workplace culminating with the unlawful police detainment of both husband and herself. In the concluding scenes, the film revives the underpinning of identity politics in Britain: the choice to integrate or segregate. Yasmin, for example, confronts what she sees as the inherent

¹⁰⁹ Kenneth Glenaan, Director, *Yasmin*, 2005.

incompatibility of being both Muslim and British and accordingly, repudiates the British establishment and in effect, her British identity. Instead, donning a hijab and traditional Pakistani clothes, she affirms her religio-cultural identity as a Pakistani-Muslim woman, leaving the viewer to conclude that being British and Muslim are two mutually exclusive categories of identity, impossible to synthesize into one.

Sharing thematic elements with “Yasmin” is the television dramatic movie “Britz.”¹¹⁰ Airing on Channel Four (October 31 and November 1, 2007), the two-part mini series explores complex issues of identity and belonging, integration and the militarization of Muslims in British ghettos. The story centers on a brother-sister pair (Sohail and Naseema, respectively), British-born and Muslim, both struggling to reconcile their British identity with their loyalty to the Pakistani Muslim community. Emphasizing his desire to assimilate, Sohail appears on screen as the proverbial integrated Muslim in British culture and society. With its visual and conversational cues, Sohail mirrors the views of popular white consciousness. He is university-educated and is critical of the polarized mind-set of family and friends in Bradford. Take, for example, when he meets a childhood friend in Bradford wearing a traditional Arab dress. His response: “I could have sworn you grew up here, not a ghetto in Gaza.” In a debate with Naseema about the police presence in Bradford, he advises against protest but instead recommends: “If police is detaining illegally, get a lawyer.” Naseema retorts: “Is that why you are studying law? You are turning into such a Brit.” Sohail counters: “I am a BRIT. So are you.” In a grand effort to show his contempt for the above provincial ideas and to stand in defense of his citizenship, Sohail joins MI5, to repay in his words: “a debt he owes Britain.” His first assignment to help track down a terrorist cell linked to the July 7th London bombers returns

¹¹⁰ Peter Kominsky, Director, *Britz*, 2007.

Sohail to his own Pakistani Muslim community in Bradford, where he confronts colliding personal and national loyalties, the ultimate test in defining one's home. At the risk of spoiling the ending of the first episode, Sohail uncovers a terrorist plot to bomb London's financial district. Further, he learns the suicide bomber is his sister, Naseema, who has been earlier presumed dead. Leaving the viewer with the question how did Naseema descend to this perilous outcome?

The concluding episode then follows Naseema as she journeys into violent extremism. Unlike Sohail, Naseema portrays the very real conflicting ideological struggle between assimilation and segregation that British Muslims encounter. At the start, she shares a similar mind-set with Sohail. A student at medical school and a social activist, Naseema has a black boyfriend (Jude) and is disillusioned with the patriarchal resistance she finds when she tries to get male Muslim members of the local mosque to get involved in social protest. Their response is: "Not a place for a woman." Complicating Naseema's portrait are a series of events, including her younger brother's harassment by members of the BNP and the unwarranted arrest and detainment, under the suspicion of terrorism, of her best friend Sabiha, culminating with Sabiha's suicide, which transitions Naseema onto a path of alienation cum radicalism. Speaking to her boyfriend, she professes: "We're fucked whatever we do, and you do not understand because you are not Muslim." At the university, Naseema starts to attend a subversive Muslim student group who appeal to her discontentment "with the system." Dispelling her questions about the prevailing gender inequities within the Muslim community, the leader of the group diminishes the purported value of democracy and Western liberalism and instead testifies:

Better than anyone, women can make mortal blows on the enemy. They can travel where a man cannot. They can enter buildings without arousing suspicion, in a way a man cannot. And they can conceal where a man cannot. A fatwa has been issued; it is a

woman's duty to seek jihad, even without the permission of her husband.

Both emboldened and embittered, Naseema puts a plan into action. She tells her parents about Jude, fully knowing her parents will return her to Pakistan. In Pakistan, after escaping her relatives' home, a badly burned body with her clothes and jewelry is discovered, and Naseema is presumed dead, thus allowing her to train, in an underground military camp, learning to make bombs. Upon returning to London, Naseema straps a bomb to her body mimicking a pregnant woman, and is prepared to bomb Canary Wharf. In the concluding scene, Sohail tries to thwart her attempt, but is too late. Naseema detonates the bomb, killing herself along with Sohail. Her final words are immortalized, and in the tradition of suicide bombers, televises a suicide video:

I know what you are thinking. You are thinking we didn't pass these laws, why are you killing our families, women and children? You are not innocent. While you keep letting this government, while you keep sitting on your hands, while they pass these laws that you know are wrong. While you look away as they butcher innocent Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Lebanon and you do nothing and you are not innocent. You will continue to be our target, so help me God.

Naseema, playing the role as suicide bomber turns current popular cultural stereotype on its head. Contributing to the climate of fear and paranoia, the imprint of "Muslim woman as militant" imagery is that Muslim women are also in active service of violent extremism. By implicating the traditional masculine trope of a suicide bomber with women, the film positions all Muslims in Britain as antagonistic to the West, indicating it is a slippery slope into mass fundamentalism. Moreover, no one is above suspicion and accordingly there is justified fear of Muslims and Islam invading Britain.

Enlightened Secular Muslim Woman

If the British media project is focused on promoting its indignation with Islam and Muslims in Britain, then also, it is committed to advancing its version of what integration should look like. Holding a mirror to the views of the general public, the reflection of a successfully integrated Muslim woman should be the same. Both characters Yasmin and Naseema show the beginning signs of integration, but the integration never fully materializes. Author Yasmin Hai's father called it his very own "Operation English." That is, her father believed the way to ensure that his Muslim children were model British citizens was to "discourage taking interest" in their Muslim past, and "urged [them] to adopt English people's ways."¹¹¹ The intended outcome was to "prevent [them] from being mistaken for traditional Indian girls" (First Person, the *Guardian*, April 5, 2008)¹¹². The media, I argue, functions with its own "Operation English." Naming this category of images "Enlightened Secular Muslim Woman," she is the normative female subject by which the British gaze measures other Muslim women. There is no irreducible difference between her and her European counterpart. She accepts Western tropes of femininity and does not display any identifying religious or cultural signs, specifically abandoning religious and cultural dress. Particularly, her unveiling is a monogram of her modernity. She embodies the rhetoric of the assimilationist project in Britain. Moreover, she impugns religio-cultural mores and launches critiques against those who support conservative gendered ideals.

Television personality Saira Khan best exemplifies the integrated enlightened secular Muslim woman. Khan was born in England, while her parents migrated from Pakistan in 1965. She participated in the UK series of the reality TV show, "The Apprentice." Her secular lifestyle

¹¹¹ Yasmin Hai *The Making of Mr. Hai's Daughter: Becoming British*. (London: Virago Press Ltd, 2008).

¹¹² Yasmin Hai. First Person. *The Guardian*. April 5, 2008.

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/apr/05/familyandrelationships.family1>> April 25, 2008.

-married to a white, British man, drinks alcohol, wears short skirts and does not wear hijab- is atypical of the Muslim community in Britain. To mark the sixtieth anniversary of the independence of India and Pakistan, she is the focus of the BBC documentary “Saira Khan’s Pakistan Adventure.”¹¹³ The two-part travelogue aims to show the unseen sides of Pakistan: a transvestite talk-show host, an artist who lives and paints nudes in the red-light district and unconventional fashion designers. By asking questions like: why is the artist on the margins of society? Or quizzically wondering why men are staring at her at a public coffee shop, Saira Khan’s perspective is that of an outsider looking in with curiosity, never fully understanding the cultural mores. She is able to articulate from a hegemonic position, a dimension of otherness that mainstream British public can embrace comfortably.

The British media adopts Khan as a native informant by lending her “authenticity” to minority issues and debates.¹¹⁴ Khan is, however, contentious in that peoples she is selected to represent question her authority to speak on their behalf. For my interviewees, some of the typical responses include:

How can a woman who has not been to Pakistan be an expert on it? There will be plenty of English people who will see it and say ‘Oh god, this is what Pakis are.’ She is promoted as an ‘expert’ in the Muslim community. She is not an expert on Islam, and yet, she is being used in that way...she is good entertainment. I thought she was constantly trying to say ‘Pakistan does not allow this, music, art, fashion’, whereas there is plenty of dancing. The western audience will see it as a medieval country (Khadija,¹¹⁵ Interview 19).

¹¹³ BBC Two, “Saira Khan’s Pakistan Adventure,” July 31, 2007.

¹¹⁴ For example on October 9, 2006, she wrote an editorial in *The Times*, entitled “Why Muslim women should thank Straw,” praising Jack Straw’s condemnation of the niqab. Additionally, on June 24, 2009, in the *Daily Mail* online edition, she editorialized “Why, I as a British Muslim woman, want the burkha banned from our street.” She writes in reference to the burkha and the *hijab*: “As a British Muslim woman, I abhor the practice and am calling on the Government to follow the lead of French President Nicolas Sarkozy and ban the burkha in our country. The veil is simply a tool of oppression which is being used to alienate and control women under the guise of religious freedom.”

¹¹⁵ Khadija is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #19.

Saira Khan claims to be a ‘moderate Muslim’...what does moderate Muslim mean? Take a bit of this, take a bit of that, bend the rules according to what suits me...for example, you invite Saira Khan to speak about hijab, what does she know about hijab, when she finds it oppressive (Sabah,¹¹⁶ Interview 30).

There is a general distrust with the media’s deliberate attempt to inscribe its own particular version of Muslim femininity and its selective appropriation of “native informants” in service of this ideal.

Strictly from the production side, a producer¹¹⁷ at BBC Birmingham summarizes the casting selection process to which precisely contributes to this painting of Muslim women in reductive strokes. Speaking about her work on the Saira Khan documentary, Nasia explains:

It was my task to find someone who would go back to Pakistan to commemorate the sixty-year anniversary [of Independence]. I offered different names, but the name that came forward was Saira Khan. She has been tagged in the press as the moderate Muslim. Everyone loves her. Even the right-wing press loves her. She has a glass of wine. She was actively trying not to be Pakistani.

Why do you have to make a point that she is Muslim? Why is she set-up as a Muslim? I have been to her house, she knows nothing about being Muslim. Actively, the impression I got when I met her was that you don’t talk about Islam but about other stuff. She tried hard to present an image that she goes down to the pub. Yet, she actively takes on roles like she makes short films for current event shows like ‘the day I wore niqab.’ One day, after Jack Straw’s comments, she did a documentary where she wore niqab and recorded people’s reaction to it. She uses her Muslim identity to get media jobs (Interview 36).

Calling it a “white man’s version of brown,” Nasia also speaks about the heavily promoted BBC Two television program “Indian Food Made Easy” and its host Anjum Anand. Touted as the

¹¹⁶ Sabah is pseudonym. See Appendix for details for Interview #30.

¹¹⁷ See Interview #36 for details about producer.

“Asian Nigella Lawson,”¹¹⁸ Anjum Anand attempts to modernize Indian food to today’s current health-focused climate. Taking issue with BBC’s hiring choice, Nasia reveals:

What I find is that Muslims or Asians who have ideas that are western-friendly, almost like a white man’s version of brown, those are the ones that make it on screen. It’s not the one with obvious quirks.

I was to find an Indian presenter for a cookery show. I gave my boss three presenters: One, young, trendy girl who wears a scarf, not in a conservative way. Two, girl who was very westernized - middle-class- Anjum Ahmed perfect South Asian, not Muslim and three, there were two young friends -Sikh in origin- but were more in tuned with their *desiness* (Indianness) my boss went for the girl who is quintessentially western but happens to be brown. She was the one who made it on screen. The other one was probably too Asian and the other too Muslim.

What is this white man’s version of brown? It is the one has a middle-class British accent, wears Marks and Spencer’s clothes, looks very preened and proper, nothing very obvious. Doesn’t eat chicken tikka but eats chicken tikka wraps. It is a palatable version of Asian (Interview 36).

The Asian Muslim radio and television personalities and producers who collaborated with me on this project agree that a media-friendly image in the British public does not include hijab. Mishal Husain, news reporter for BBC World News, for example, understands that she is “painted as acceptable and westernized” because she chooses not to wear hijab, whereas “anyone in hijab is put in a different corner” (Interview 51). A journalist for BBC Asian Network, similarly, confides to me that her decision to delay wearing the hijab is her fear of the impact at work. She questions: I know it is so sad, but how will I be perceived? Will I stagnate my career? Will I be viewed in a particular light?” (Sabah, Interview 29). In a more surprising position, a freelance journalist at Al-Jazeera tells me that Al-Jazeera has a standing policy that it does not want women in hijab on television, because “they don’t want to be seen as a Muslim station”

¹¹⁸ Aida Edemariam, “Move over Nigella,” *The Guardian*, July 14, 2007.

(Samina,¹¹⁹ Interview 48). Most significant from this discussion about media-friendly images is that to contribute effectively to mainstream media, Muslim women need to be the enlightened, secular Muslim woman; her everyday performance in public space requires erasure of religious identity and further, the ability to ventriloquize public sentiment against such identity.

Self-Identified, Empowered Muslim Woman

Notwithstanding the anteceding category of media images, there is a small percentage of exposure focused on promoting the empowered voice of Muslim minority women in mainstream media. The initiative is to push gently against existing stereotypes, and to promote a new understanding of what it means to be both British and a practicing Muslim. *Marie Claire UK*, for example, published a report entitled “I’m Muslim and British,”¹²⁰ Interviewing three women (veiled and unveiled), author Sarfraz Manzoor discusses the first-person long-term consequences of 7/7 on their lives. For all three women, there is a palpable resentment for being implicated with terrorists. Instead, their lived realities include the comfortable co-existence of job, family, friends and citizenship with religious identity in Britain. On a more large-scale platform, launched on October 1, 2007, the “Islam is Peace” nationwide press campaign attempts to belabor a similar message: Muslims should not be feared in Britain. Starting its campaign in London, and then across the UK, trains, buses, the tube and its respective stations carried images of British Muslims and messages of their positive contribution to British society. For example, one advertisement shows Diane Reeves, a white woman, who converted to Islam. She works for the Metropolitan Police Service while also wearing hijab. The heading under her photograph reads: “Proud to Be a British Muslim.” By obfuscating who Muslims can be in Britain, the advertisements challenge normative assumptions about Muslim foreigners invading and

¹¹⁹ Samina is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #48.

¹²⁰ Sarfraz Manzoor, “I’m Muslim and British,” *Marie Claire UK*, 143-148.

terrorizing British land. A point of contention for me, is however, would the advertisement convey the same reading if the woman was non-white. There is a subtle racial undercurrent suggesting that a person of color is perhaps less relatable to a larger audience than a white Muslim person.

In another example, on the small screen, a BBC One documentary, “Ramadan: She’s a Thoroughly Modern Muslim”¹²¹ (September 12, 2007)¹²², follows the lives of four professional Muslim women, who give voice to the experience of a moderate Muslim in Britain. Again, we see similar protest of the preconceptions and lingering hostilities towards Muslims in Britain and an attempt to re-assert their “Britishness.” This, of course, is a move in the right direction as provides a moment of reflection. However, by running in tandem with primarily negative generalizations about Muslims, it may be insufficient to dismantle the legacy of Islamophobia in and outside the media. More specific, a criticism leveled at these projects is the question: Who has the authority to intervene at these sites of knowledge production? Directing her comment to the “Ramadan: She’s a Thoroughly Modern Muslim” documentary, Nasia laments:

That is what is so frustrating of working in the media, let’s get someone to make a film who has a limited understanding of the area. Person who made it thought Muslims are a hot topic right now, let’s get women, because they are oppressed and let’s get them to say how great they are. And because I know from fact, because I know who made the film, they have a limited understanding [of Muslim women] (Interview36).

¹²¹ BBC One. “Ramadan: She’s a Thoroughly Modern Muslim,” September 12, 2007.

¹²² On a side note, the documentary aired at 11:15pm. Bringing speculation to who the network expects the viewers to be having the show air in a late time slot. As an interviewee remarked: “Anything related to Muslim women is on late night on television” (Interview 24). Another claims: Media does not like positive images of minority communities, they like negative images...because every positive film I have seen is on late at night. It is boring to say Muslims like Islam, it is more sensational to say that modern Muslims are apostate to Islam (Interview 34).

Re-igniting an insider/outsider paradigm, Nasia (who incidentally to remind readers is a BBC television assistant producer) struggles to reconcile the ideal with the reality of secular media. She reasons: “You might be offered several voices, but the one that is taken is the one that is familiar...not a new voice because it is harder to marry that new voice to a set editorial” (Interview 36). There is a perceptible acceptance in the Muslim community that secular media may not be able to advance Muslim women’s interests or to capture effectively their religio-cultural identity.

Muslim-Centric Media

It bears repeating that an unintended consequence of maligning Muslims in the media and the supra focus on its women has been a renewal of tensions between Muslims and the West, and further the ethnic and religious homogenization within the British Muslim imagination.

Reminding readers of Leila Ahmed’s exploratory work in *Gender and Islam* addressed in the introduction of this work, the blueprint of gender relationships in the colonial past as set out by Ahmed, are true today. Like her historical counterpart, many Muslim women in Britain are the entrusted agents of tradition.

Unmistakably, the first three sets of imageries are sites of contesting cultures: secular/modern and religio-culture/tradition, both intervening at the site of the body. The images masquerade as objective truth. The Muslim woman, in its varied manifestations, is an invented tool; popular culture and media create and reinforce particular meanings. My collaborators ascribe secular media as the predominant instrument, which prevaricates untruths about Islam, propagates Islamaphobia, and commits structural violence against the Muslim community by

portraying its members as “terrorists,” “fundamentalists,” “extremists,” or as “oppressed.”¹²³

The Muslim woman herself is denied subjectivity. In public space, her gendered body and movement are a mechanism for control and require rigorous discipline and surveillance to protect and/or unsettle tradition. In the face of such discursive challenges and on-going mainstream media intrusions, there is an attempt to deploy an alternative narrative, one which, articulates a new construct of Muslim femininity against a backdrop of neo-imperialism, anti-Muslim opinion, and additionally, male resistance within the Muslim community. There is an internal campaign to change the media, one that advances within a framework sensitive to religion specific.

Minority media are not a novel idea in Britain. The state promotes multiculturalism because it acknowledges the fragmentation and displacement of immigrants, celebrates hybridity, and promotes the expression of alternative cultural forms. For example, as part of its commitment to cultural plurality, BBC offers its Asian audience an Asian television and radio network. Central to the network’s program is the fusion of British cultural commodities with music, and news programming indigenous to the Indian sub-continent. The Asian body politic boasts plurality, and accordingly, the media place the Muslim spectator alongside its Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi counterpart on the continuum between Britishness and Asianess, subsuming religious and/or ethnic identity under the umbrella term of “Asian.” However, the immediate problem with a centralized geographical/cultural focus in the media is that faith-based points of view are invisible or set aside for more popular voices accepted by both

¹²³ I received a forwarded e-mail from an interview respondent (Interview 10) which exemplifies this point of view . The subject heading read “Let Us Evaluate How Media Portrays Muslims...as Terrorists, Fundamentalists, Extremists.” The content of the forward is a systematic comparison of news headlines, where both Muslims and non-Muslims committed similar crimes. It finds that where crimes are committed by Muslims, religion is noted always in the headlines. Disparage Muslims – The e-mail requests friends to forward e-mail to “let people know who are the real terrorists are.”

the public and the state. Exercising her frustration at this point, Sabah, a journalist for BBC Asian Network, tells me:

I remember the first team briefing [at an earlier radio job] and the niqab and hijab stories were being blown out of proportion and everybody wanted to cover it...I remember sitting in the news meeting and they started having a random discussion about Muslims... there was Sikh girl on the team and she said “We as Asians, don’t want to be associated with them and stand apart”...I responded by saying “Excuse me, there is a Muslim on the team, we are not all like that”...I think Hinduism and Sikhism are more acceptable (Interview 30).

This battle for equal footing puts Islamic conversations at a disadvantage where minority media, in this case Asian Network, has little vested interest in popularizing its association with Islam.

To counteract the effects of marginalization of faith-based identity in the media, there is a growing development of Muslim-centric media produced within the British Muslim community. By employing the same discursive tools as other media institutions, British Muslims are attempting to build a bridge between British popular opinion and the Muslim community. This undertaking reflects their need for increased voice and visibility in the public space, their hope to normalize Muslim presence in Britain by (re)presenting Muslim subjectivities on their own terms, and their desire to undermine the Islam/West polarizing paradigm. Following are three examples of new Muslim media (radio and television) offering a counter-space for alternative voices to be (re)presented:

Emel Magazine

Emel is a British lifestyle magazine that “celebrates contemporary British Muslim culture.” The glossy magazine targeted to “mainstream” or “moderate” Muslims includes topics such as arts, politics, food, fashion, and travel. The cover photograph pictures influential Muslims from British politics, arts and entertainment world. In an interview, Ramona Ali, deputy

editor of the magazine, sees the objective to make the distinction between Muslim as a people and Islam as a religion. She explains:

Emel came about because there was nothing to celebrate the positive aspect of Muslim life rather than let other people define us and say this is what Muslims are doing ... we are here to define ourselves. It is not a response...it is a proactive move. We are a Muslim lifestyle magazine not Islamic...Muslim is the person. We are trying to reflect the people who belong to the faith, and they might interpret the faith in different ways. We want to reflect the best of those of people, the people who are inspiring and who are role models. An Islamic magazine is more directly about the faith and its principles – we try to tell it through people (Interview 72).

Illustrating this point are articles such as: “Eid Style” (October 2007);¹²⁴“Regarding the Earth: UNEP Photography Competition” (May/June 2005);¹²⁵“Eco Interiors: Sustainable Style” (February 2008);¹²⁶“Hassan Massoudy: On the Art of Avant-Garde” (April 2008).¹²⁷ By normalizing the British Muslim lived experience, *Emel* demystifies the Muslim subject; he/she is more than its common associations: terrorism, violence and/or oppression.

City Sisters on Islam Channel

Hosted by four Muslim women of varied age and ethnic backgrounds, the television program “City Sisters,” on Islam Channel¹²⁸ is a women’s lifestyle show that is “made by women, for women.” Topics on the show include fashion, cooking segments, health, travel and auto repair. The goal is to present “Muslim women in a new light.” The producers divide the format of the television show into four segments, each related by the chosen theme of the

¹²⁴ “Eid Style,” *Emel*, October 2007, 48-52.

¹²⁵ “Regarding the Earth” *Emel*, May/June 2005, 12-17.

¹²⁶ Hakan Ibrahim, “Green House Effect,” *Emel*, February 2008, 66-69.

¹²⁷ Myriam Francois Cerrah. “Authentic Avante-Garde,” *Emel*, April 2008, 22-29.

¹²⁸ London-based Islam Channel offers “alternative news, current affairs and entertainment programming from an Islamic perspective” <<http://www.islamchannel.tv>>. Programs include: “Muslimah Dilemma;” “Marriage Maintenance;” “Building an Islamic Home;” “Politics and Media;” “Model Mosque,” a reality show competition to find the best mosque in the UK.

episode. Opening with a “chit-chat” about the theme, the second segment focuses on “Creative Soul,” where one of the hosts presents a look at creative women in the arts (hip-hop artists, graffiti artists, poets, painters). Following third is “Close-Up.” Here, the hosts film themselves outside the studio, engaging in different activities such as creative home spa or driving. The show concludes with “Inspiration and Tips.” Sharing *Emel* magazine’s intent, “City Sisters” is also searching for ways to mainstream Muslims. For the hosts, this is accomplished by defining Muslims “in their own way.” Telling me collectively:

We want to define what a Muslim woman is... there are two definitions there, if you are going to define a Muslim woman, let her speak for herself, which is what City Sisters is doing... we are actually showing Muslim community – practicing sisters and non-practicing - that we are normal, that we do what we like to do but do it within boundaries and rules and we can have fun. (Interview 56¹²⁹)

Once again, the enterprise is to minimize the spectacle and instead, emphasize the common British experience. It should be said that a number of my respondents are regular viewers of the show. For example, praising the show, Jamia comments:

Muslims are perceived as not having a laugh, as not having a life... it goes to show that we are women, we do the same things as you, we do have physical relationships, we do want be attractive, we do want to dress up, we do have a good time, we are into cars... Islam doesn’t mean that we torture ourselves... those who build culture into religion, a kind of program like this brings out the fact it is not haram to do certain things” (Interview 62)

Unity FM

Unity FM is a community radio station, serving “the needs of some of the most deprived wards in Birmingham,” with a “particular focus on the diverse Muslim communities within the city.”¹³⁰ The goal is to empower the Muslim community by educating them about community

¹²⁹ See Appendix for details on Interview #56.

¹³⁰ See website for details <<http://www.unityfm.net>> January 15, 2008.

issues that affect their lives. The programming looks at local politics, health topics such as high blood pressure or infant mortality, and education issues such as curriculum or initiatives for separate schooling. A particular “girl chit-chat show” is the “Nas and Nad Show.” Hosted by two women, the show engages with community issues meaningful to young girls and women. Nasia describes the concept: “It’s for a giggle. It’s meant to be a chit chat show...speaking about marriage, social networking, issues of motherhood, manners...we are able to be realistic about what our community is about” (Interview 36). The program and the radio station itself provide a vehicle of communication for marginal members of the community who may not have access to necessary information.

Keeping Muslim-centric media in mind, I ask the question: can alternative Muslim knowledge production encourage the empowerment of British Muslim women or instead further marginalize them from the secular mainstream? What is problematic about alternative Muslim knowledge production is that women are still subject to cultural boundaries and patriarchal control. To make my point, I consider Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon’s (2005) “in-between space,” the unfixed space Muslim women occupy; “one that cuts across the binary oppositions of self and other or “slave and master” (1). Muslim woman as a category of identification and representation continues to be ambivalent, strategically negotiated. For example, operating within alternative Muslim knowledge sites are the underpinnings of hegemonic masculinity. Despite a female-centric media focus, the control of media space and movement belong to men, and there are no real shifts of authoritative voices. Islam channel’s policy holds, for example, all on-air female presenters must wear hijab. Additionally, in November 2010, Ofcom (independent UK communications regulator) censured Islam Channel for advocating marital rape and violence

against women.¹³¹ So that, although, the Muslim-centric media directs the mainstream gaze to an alternative voice, a power apparatus still constitutes the alternative voice, and mediates the production of “Muslim Woman.”

I will make the argument, however, that we see a precursor to what I call “incremental empowerment” in chapter two, whereby women are able to intervene at a psychological level. To quote Edward Said: “Counter-discourse, autoethnography, talking back, writing back, directing an oppositional gaze...breaks the silence (of the Other) and resists violence (of representation)” (quoted in Steet 2002, 7). *Emel* magazine, for example, militates against imposed representations of Muslim women. The production team achieves this in two ways: first, the editors commit themselves to draw conscious attention to a cross-section of Muslims, including women veiled and unveiled. Commenting on their pictorial cover of Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, who incidentally does not wear hijab, Ramona Ali explains:

Few voices said that she should not be on the front cover ...we said that she identifies herself as Muslim woman and has achieved a lot of success. She is out there and a role model ...we are not pushing the fact she does not wear hijab in the interview, it is about what she has contributed in politics and how she identifies herself as a practicing Muslim (Interview 72).

Secondly, *Emel's* fashion spreads purposefully display disembodied female bodies. By obscuring the model's head and face, the editors circumvent questions about veiling, and more important, questions surrounding who the paradigmatic Muslim woman is. As one of the hosts

¹³¹ On Nov. 8, 2010, the *Guardian* quotes the ruling as follows: “Islam Channel regularly promoted violent extremist views and regressive attitudes towards women. In a program first broadcast in April last year, Ofcom ruled that the Islam Channel host Nazreen Nawaz [Muslimah Dilemma] condoned marital rape when she said: "And really the idea that a woman cannot refuse her husband's relations this is not strange to a Muslim because it is part of maintaining that strong marriage. But it shouldn't be such a big problem where the man feels he has to force himself upon the woman." The channel also broke the broadcasting code by encouraging violence against women, in a Q&A session on marital violence, and for labeling women who wore perfume "prostitutes.” <guardian.co.uk>

from City Sisters suggests: “We need a new definition of a Muslim woman in the Western context...we need to gain confidence from our own Muslim women as accepting our representation of Muslim women, then we can enter the mainstream and move forward” (Interview 56). Alternative media allow for the possibility to complicating existing frames of reference by countering mainstream representations with “Muslim media forms that specifically recognize Muslim Britishness” (Ahmed 2006, 7). For British Muslim women on the margins, it offers an “in-between” space to undermine both mainstream media and antiquated practices in Islam to reflect a “modern’ aesthetic; an aesthetic which offers Muslim women a starting foundation “in which she can recognize herself and find similar subjects of reflection” (Rigoni 2006, 82).

Chapter 4 - Fashioning the Muslim Woman: Exploring Dress Reform

In the last chapter I discussed the representation of Muslim women in British media, and discussed alternative media as spaces for Muslim women to subvert some of the negative imagery. A part of this phenomenon of “talking back” is the play on Islamic dress (more specifically the veil/hijab), which I elaborate in this chapter.

Overburdened with symbolism, the veil sustains negative media representations of British Muslim women. Coded with a variegated set of meanings, the veil remains salient as a continuing visual trope of a complicated presence of Islam in Britain and greater Europe. Reduced to a set of polarities: veiled or unveiled, religious/secular, traditional/modern, backward/progressive, and oppressed/liberated, the veil, as part of religious dress, informs the narrative of the inferiority of the Muslim Other.¹³²

Amidst recent public policy debates in Britain over proposing a wholesale burqa ban, no doubt a political carryover from France, Netherlands and Germany, the veil continues as site of struggle and contestation about the position of women in Islam. There is a renewed questioning of the social implications for Muslim women and more broadly, what it means to have a visible presence of Islam in the UK. For example, on January 17, 2010, the “Politics Show” on BBC, aired its own debate about whether face-covering veils worn by Muslim women in Britain should be banned? Arguing that the burqa was a symbol of an “increasingly divided Britain,” Nigel Farage, a former leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party, expressed the view that the burqa oppresses women, and is a potential security threat:

¹³² There is vast literature on the issue of Muslim women and the veil. Writings include: Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (2003); Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. (1991); Joan Wallace Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*. (2007); Bronwyn Winter, *Hijab & The Republic: Uncovering the French Headscarf Debate*. (2008).

What we are saying is, this is a symbol. It's a symbol of something that is used to oppress women. It is a symbol of an increasingly divided Britain. And the real worry - and it isn't just about what people wear - the real worry is that we are heading towards a situation where many of our cities are ghettoised and there is even talk about Sharia law becoming part of British culture.

In light of the presumed increased visibility of Islam in public space, state anxieties about marginalization, segregation, cultural authenticity and national belonging linger in political discourse. Uncritically, then, Islamic dress is further accorded prominence as the public manifestation of this assailed religious-cultural identity in Britain. This narrow understanding distorts the complex process through which British Muslim women negotiate religious and cultural prescriptions with clothing choices.

Because of my fear of colluding with the Western preoccupation with Islamic dress, my hope was to move away from the interstices of this particular narrative. I did not want to bolster the reductive representations of Muslim women by focusing on what they wear. Like Fatima Mernissi (1987), I wanted to move “beyond the veil.” However, I found that instead, the sartorial biographies of my research participants were relevant in their struggle for self-determination and empowerment and had a contributive effect on citizenship discourse. For these individual women, clothing choices play a transformative role in the construction and (re)presentation of an alternative social self and in generating new religious and cultural forms of belonging in the diasporic Muslim community. Accordingly, this chapter departs from the conventional dichotomies listed above and instead, demonstrates that through interaction with the West, British Muslim women, Asian in this context, are producing new understandings of Islamic dress-- dress which operates, hand in hand, with reform and resistance.

In order to situate the contemporary situation, it is necessary to historicize the particular relationship between Britain and the south Asian sub-continent. For my purpose, Leila Ahmed's

(1992) historical account of the interplay of colonial, feminist and native discourse in considering the veil and/or native dress, and additionally Edward Said's (1979) analysis of Orientalism both provide a compelling discursive frame in understanding sartorial difference. In looking at colonial-era Orientalism to present-day post-colonial Orientalism, we can observe the construction of the colonial subject through the process of "Othering" by bringing attention to differences in appearance and clothing. Read as indexes of deeper differences, vitriolic critiques of native dress practices were central to colonial rule. Repeating a pattern continuing to play out in competing scripts, traditions linking women, Islam and the veil assume constancy in colonial and neo-colonial rhetoric. In post 9/11 era, the purported plight of the "forcibly covered" Muslim woman continues to serve western ideological interests as it invites the moral justification for military intervention and austere policy measures for immigrant minorities. Predictably, the western gaze stands in opposition to any visible expression of native culture and/or religion. Standing Islam against itself, Western pundits routinely accept that Islam is innately oppressive to women and the practice of veiling communicates both backwardness and inferiority of Islam and the oppression itself. The colonial prescription for change is to abandon elements of native customs and culture. A keynote feature of rescuing native women from misogynistic native traditions (what Gayatri Spivak calls "white men, saving brown women from brown men"¹³³) and liberating them from oppression is a discursive push to unveil. The veil or hijab assumes high visibility as a natural link to religion and culture, the veiled Muslim woman mimetically performs these traditions, and as such, colonial and post-colonial powers presumably bear the responsibility of erasing such practice.

¹³³Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory; A Reader*. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds. (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheasheaf, 1994), 93

The exercise of colonial authority over the natives' clothing and the restriction of dress choices elicit an equally contentious native response. Through claims of "tradition," religious and cultural dress forms feature prominently in the struggle to define national identity in terms of visible difference from its Western counterpart. As traced in Ahmed's book (1992), once colonial rhetoric linked indigenous traditions to women, then the natural defense to such critique was to argue on the same terms and place "their" women at the center of religious and cultural traditional practice. In the Indian sub-continent for example, women were recast as symbols of a superior culture, and essential to the continuity of "home." Cultural discourse idealizes women as the repository of moral respectability, and therefore, women require "defense from outside contamination" (Niessen 2003, 11). Further, because clothing is a significant object of colonial control, it becomes fundamental in contests over modern or traditional identity. Post-colonial migrants traveling from home to the West add another dimension to the social process. In the diaspora, importantly, policing immigrant bodily practices ensures the reproduction of religious and cultural forms of native belonging. What Wendy Parkins names the "geography of dress" (2002, 9), is the connection between dress and borders. She writes: "Dress is a situated bodily practice...important for identifying citizens" (2002, 8-9). The self and communal bodily presentation of dress was and continues to be a tool in communicating the "true" character of the community.

Fashioning a national dress is key to nation-building projects. In Germany, the Nazi regime fashioned its female citizens visually to represent its political ideologies. German ideologues presented fashion, or more specifically French fashion as a foreign intrusion and "un-German," and instead, German cultural authorities promoted a different version of femininity,

what the Association for German Women's Clothing and Women's culture termed "functional beauty." Its description included:

In contrast to the overtly sexual fashions of French females, German fashions should be chaste and reflective of their strength, independence and inherently nurturing nature. Secondly, German fashions should be designed to support healthiness, morality procreation and, therewith, motherhood (Guenther 2004, 39).

In India, Emma Tarlo (1996) documents Ghandi's ambition to "recreate" Indian dress in the shadow of the British attempt to control or "civilize" Indians and their local clothing practices. Ghandi saw the imitation of Western dress as tantamount to the destruction of Indian tradition. Accordingly, Ghandi perceived it a moral duty to encourage women to replace wearing foreign cloth with *khadi*, a homespun cotton. Elsewhere on the Indian sub-continent, the Muslim minority also mediated their relationship with the state through attention to clothing. In sharp contrast to shapely, and at times, revealing European dress, Muslim women generally wore a *dupatta/chunni* (gossamer veil) draped lightly on her head along with the *shalwar kameez* (tunic and trousers). Parminder Bhachu offers a more precise description of shalwar kameez:

Shalwar kameez is composed of a long tunic with slits (of varying length, but normally between twelve-fifteen inches, depending on the fashion context) down both sides, loose baggy trousers, often with a cuff at the ankle, width with all these components, change with fashion styles, as they do with shape and silhouettes.¹³⁴ (2003, 140)

Resting on a script of difference, Indian cultural authorities capitalize on the appeal for moral decency by positioning Indian dress as the chaste, modest and culturally authentic choice.

¹³⁴ Bhachu, Parminder. "Designing Diasporic Markets: Asian Fashion Entrepreneurs in London" in *Re-Orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress*. Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkovich, and Carla Jones, eds. (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 139-158.

British Asians in the diaspora continue to read dress with the same cultural eye thereby only strengthening the sartorial story written in the Indian sub-continent. Migrating Asian community members find difficulty in disentangling themselves from old stereotypes. The British social landscape still adheres to its historic apparitions about cultural dress. The British public disparages the shalwar kameez, for example, as a “pajama-or-night suit,” and accuses its wearers of “maintaining their backward culture” (Bhachu 2004 11). Baroness Manzila Uddin explains the problem with her choice to wear a sari by reflecting on her experience:

Wearing traditional clothes has been a hindrance because there are cultural misunderstandings and stereotypes that is a summation of an Asian woman, and in my clothes, I am sure people would not know that I am a member of the House of Lords, thinking I am a poor, silly woman, and that I am oppressed and regularly suffering (Interview 64).

Submitting to a reactive posture, the Asian migrant community, for its part, recycles its own generalized assumptions of Western immorality. With their deepening concerns about religious and cultural continuity, feelings of dislocation and social anxieties about safeguarding the moral fabric of “their” women, the Asian community relies heavily on the familiar “us” and “them” ideological distinctions, and further, roots their dress narrative in these early understandings of the colonizer-colonized relationship presented in the introduction and chapter two. Based on a set of polarities, their vision of dress assumes a set of universal characteristics describing women in the Western body politic. The Asian dress narrative ascribes westernized/modern women as vulgar, brazen, sexually promiscuous, loud, and lacking moral sense, and accordingly a “good” Asian girl should embody everything the Western woman is not. Further, the “good” Asian girl should resist the Western “moral” imperative to adopt Western dress. By doing so, she will affirm her unique religio-cultural identity.

In service of cultural preservation in the diaspora, immigrants recode the shalwar kameez

as both a symbol of moral respectability and an expression of ethnic pride. In the Asian Muslim community under study, more so than hijab, the shalwar kameez takes on a singular role in visually signifying the values by which women should comport themselves. To the question: “Who is considered a ‘good’ girl?,” the majority of the responses to my interviews included a passing remark about the material link between wearing traditional clothes and the perception of purity and wholesome good. Following are responses characteristic of this point:

I was expected to wear traditional clothes - shalwar kameez - at home and on days in school when school uniform was not required. On non-school uniform day, I was expected to wear traditional dress. When I wanted to wear something different, why do you have to be different, why are you white? Growing up it was difficult...they wanted us to be Pakistani all of the time. (Alia, Interview 7)

My mum instilled in me that I was different [than whites] because I was a girl...I wasn't allowed to go on any school trips. She expected me to wear shalwar kameez because English clothing was not considered modest...it was not ‘our way.’ You changed for something negative if you did [were Western clothes]...she still does not like me wearing trousers but is okay with me wearing [long] skirts...she would say ‘don’t sit in front of your dad wearing trousers, it is not modest enough’ (Farisa, Interview 22).

I wear shalwar kameez at home. Out of the house, I am not dressed Paki. Some of the girls in the community were expected to wear shalwar kameez all the time. To be honest, everything is just appearance. You can be anywhere as long as you are wearing your shalwar kameez and you are putting up a front that you are a good girl. I know quite a few girls in our community, they dress in shalwar kameez, they got boyfriends, they go out, do everything under the sun...but people in the community consider girls who wear trousers and tops bad (Azkaa, Interview 38).

I wear shalwar kameez at home. We never wore anything that would bring our family name into disrepute...nowadays you see girls wearing short tops, wear skirts and people talk about you. Because I work closely with the Muslim community, if I dressed like that it certainly would not be acceptable...people would be

very disapproving of the way you dress (Summaya¹³⁵, Interview 53).

I was brought up as Pakistani... expected to wear shalwar kameez at home and at school. If you started to wear jeans all of a sudden, people would say: 'whoa, you don't wear jeans' ...people would think you are too liberal if you dress westernized (Saliha, Interview 49-50)

My parents raised me as a good girl...I don't have any brothers. I was in charge for looking after the family...I used to cook and clean...they wanted me to be proud of my Pakistani identity. They wanted me to wear Pakistani clothes...make sure I covered my head in a cultural manner rather than a religious manner (Mahnaz, Interview 70¹³⁶).

What I see is a dialectic process at work. Elevating the moral meaning of traditional clothing practices also serves simultaneously to implicate women who wear “westernized” clothes as bad, immodest, lascivious, immodest and inviting disrepute. The community reproaches anyone for trying to be “English” or “White” by wearing western-fashioned clothes: jeans, skirts and t-shirts. As Alia put it to me simply: “If you are wearing English clothes, you are trying to be white” (Interview 7).

This community under study manages to sustain the proverbial link between women's clothing practices and threatening westernization within their community borders by inventing a privileged space where, by prevailing upon real fears of social exclusion, it can contain and maintain women's bodies under close chastisement. The neighborhood women, for example, questioned Shaheen's mum as to why she allowed her daughters to wear “trousers” (Interview 4). In another example, students attending a primarily Muslim school bullied Saliha¹³⁷ for wearing “skirts and short-sleeved tops” (Interview 49-50). Similarly, Khadija's husband

¹³⁵ Summaya is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #53.

¹³⁶ Mahnaz is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #70.

¹³⁷ Saliha is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #49-50.

pressured her to wear shalwar kameez after they married and moved in with her in-laws. Her account exemplifies the moving processes. Khadija grew up in a predominantly white area where her father encouraged integration with members outside the Muslim/Pakistani community. She felt “English.” So much so, the Pakistani community ostracized her for not being “Pakistani” enough. She married a Pakistani-Muslim man of her choice, despite community retorts like “Your mother has no culture in her, that is why you are allowed to marry who you want.” Her in-laws treat her “like an English girl who married into the family” (they wanted her husband to marry a cousin from a village in Pakistan). To minimize family discord, Khadija’s husband asked her to not to wear “skirts, trousers and jeans” in her in-laws’ home. She conceded to their request for fear of rejection (Interview 24). A similar case is that of Shaista.¹³⁸ Shaista, as well, was raised in a predominantly white suburb, in the town of Nuneaton. Her parents raised her as “very modern.” In her words:

My father had integrated very well. Hence, as a daughter, I was allowed to go out... I didn’t stop going to school at eighteen. I think the Muslim community today are about ‘girls don’t do this, girls don’t do that’...worried about what people will say...where we were, not having many Asians around, we weren’t bothered with it. Where I was living, I wore jeans and sleeveless tops, skirts... I knew I was different. I was allowed to dress Western (Interview 42).

However, she married a family member at age twenty (her own choice). Having moved to Birmingham, her extended family members were concerned about the community’s perception about the way she dressed: “*auntiji kya kengye*” (What will the aunty say?). Feeling social expectations from her “in-laws and older aunties,” she now wears shalwar kameez. She admits that she compels her daughter to do the same. “If she is visiting a community member, I ask her to wear something appropriate.” Shaista imagines that if her daughter is seen wearing western

¹³⁸ Shaista is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #42.

clothes, the “aunties will say ‘*bathamiz larki, kya penawahe?*’ (Impudent/shameless girl, what is she wearing?). Speaking about the aunties, Shaista explains: “In their eyes, they have one straight line -A decent girl is covered head to toe, wearing shalwar kameez, she ties up her hair. A modern girl is dressing up like the ‘*goriayan*’ (like the white girls)” (Interview 42). For Shaista and others, the fear of social stigma and isolation for themselves and their daughters/sisters forces them to toe the phantom cultural line.

The unease by which immigrant community members accept the changing cultural landscape signals a widening gulf between East and West; a cultural war where women’s bodily performance continues to be a profound site of contestation. Noted earlier, “white” serves as a re-branded umbrella term for what women should not be; white is the other. The sub-text of the shalwar kameez is it marks moral women apart from the other; shalwar kameez hints at the wearer’s need for protection from the outside: physical and ideological, and further, signals the wearer’s measure of gendered worth. There is an assumption, for example, that a woman who wears shalwar kameez lives up to the moral expectations linked to Pakistani dress, and therefore, she increases the likelihood, for example, to secure a husband. In fact, an often-asked question to marriage brokers is whether “she wears trousers and/or skirts.” If the answer is yes, then marriage brokers believe the marriage could be ill fated. Mothers seeking wives for their sons prefer girls who wear shalwar kameez suggesting these girls have not been “polluted by the West” (Nighat,¹³⁹Interview 57). Reflecting on her own experience, Rima, a BBC journalist, describes it as “trussed up to be made to look a particular way in order to be marketed as a marriageable girl” (Interview 46).

¹³⁹ Nighat is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #57.

With its underpinning in ideas of “honor,” traditional clothing is visual authorization of perceived morality, and at the risk of belaboring the point, a “good” girl. However, notwithstanding the benefits it yields or the “protection” it affords, I argue wearing shalwar kameez or traditional clothing translates into containment for women. Encoded in the community’s ambivalence towards Western clothes are inflexible cultural codes limiting the advancement of women. These sartorial practices are circumscribed by the rules of comportment highlighted in chapter one, and operate hand in hand with traditions which de-limit women’s access to education, coerce marriage and restrict mobility and integration outside of community borders.

It is not surprising, then, that a key site of struggle for empowerment is resistance to an imposed “moral” dress code. By drawing on the ethnographic focus on women’s dress performance strategies in my interviews, I develop the idea that, in fact, straightforwardly considering clothing practices, particularly by fixing such practices to binary categories (tradition/western), does not produce a faithful reading of what is ostensibly a complicated context. Instead, British Muslim-Asian women are expressing multiple subjectivities by challenging dichotomous understandings of identity, and by re-negotiating meanings attached to dress to accommodate alternate identities. Finding themselves on the metaphorical border between two discursive formations: a racialized discourse of difference or a patriarchal discourse that defines femininity, these women are making attempts to move outside ideological constraints by crafting new British-Asian-Muslim identities through clothing. Actively using dress to subvert cultural codes, engaging with multiple cultural forms, and re-appropriating meanings associated with “English” and “Asian,” women in my project are forging alternate hybrid-identities to manage strategically their identities in public space. Below are two examples

of such constructed bodily performances, which I believe adequately illustrate this re-imagining of identity: putting on “jeans” and putting on “hijab.”

Putting on “Jeans”:

In one of the earlier scenes of the film “Yasmin”¹⁴⁰ (2005), the title character, on her way to work, outside the figurative community borders, begins her daily routine by changing out of traditional Pakistani clothes and putting on a pair of jeans. Conversely, at the end of the day, Yasmin changes back into her shalwar kameez before she returns home. Symbolizing a measure of freedom that evaded her at home, her ritual transition to “English” girl is more than an example of fiction. The film represents the very real negotiation with dress taking place in Asian immigrant communities in Britain. As indicated in an earlier section of this chapter, underpinning the cultural narrative in this ethnically conservative community is values and traditions coded as oppositional to white, Western culture. Eliding “English” with “white” sets the stage whereby members mark community space by its own particular embodied geography and, duly, all things associated with British culture are equally disparaged. In this system of inclusion and exclusion, cultural narrative dismisses Western clothing (pants, short-sleeved tops, and jeans) for women as an inauthentic expression of Indo-Pakistani religio-cultural traditions, and members police clothing choices accordingly.

At the forefront of these dress prescriptions is a general derision for wearing jeans; jeans exemplify the western eroding standards of femininity, morality and modesty. There is, for example, a cultural innuendo that only divorced women wear jeans. Upon moving home after Seema’s divorce, Seema’s mother, for example, confronts her for wearing jeans and a t-shirt. Her mother likens her outfit to coming home “naked,” scolding Seema, “Look at you, your bum is

¹⁴⁰ Kenneth Glenaan, Director. *Yasmin*. 2005.

going to rip out of your trousers, you should have put a scarf on your shoulders” (Interview 69). While Mina¹⁴¹ is only contemplating divorce, her mother, as well, accuses Mina of being a “bad Muslim for wanting a divorce.” Coincidentally, Mina’s mother also hates Mina’s clothes. Mina tells me: “She wishes I wore shalwar kameez. I am too modern for her. She calls me ‘*Angrez ki bachi*’ (girl possessed by white)” (Interview 40). Shanu,¹⁴² also divorced, on the other hand, chooses not to wear jeans in spite of the community expectations for her to do so: “of course, she would wear jeans” (Interview 58). Presumably, this leaves one to conclude that there is a definable correlation between disreputable behavior, and what women wear.

Taking issue with the determinative associations with clothing, many women within this Asian-Muslim community are uncomfortable with what they see as cultural impositions on their bodily performance. They seek to challenge the uncritical acceptance of traditional rhetoric that imposes its version of femininity on women. Thus, if wearing shalwar kameez is an appeal to tradition, then it stands to reason that the adoption of Western dress conveys the desire to violate the cultural ideal. Many of the women I interviewed are resisting the cultural imperative to wear Asian dress and attribute this shift in response to both their disconnect with Asian traditions, and as well, their wish to be identified and accepted as modern and British. Born in Britain, they identify themselves as British, and accordingly question anachronistic standards of cultural conduct, and instead, want to adopt or adapt to some of Britain’s cultural mores. A starting point for contesting home traditions is exercising authority over their clothing choices. Wearing jeans or trousers is an embodied performance whereby they choose to resist entrenched meanings and define “westernized” for themselves. Remembering their first act of attrition (usually in the safe space of school settings):

¹⁴¹ Mina is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #40.

¹⁴² Shanu is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #58.

I had a reputation in the Muslim community as being a bit of a wild one ...I was not wild, but I was not conforming...I hated Indian suits... I was always in jeans and t-shirts (Amina¹⁴³, Interview 55)

When we were young and more secluded, we wore shalwar kameez at home. But as we grew up, and became more independent we started changing...wearing trousers, long skirts...I remember the first time I wore trousers - I was seventeen- ...I was petrified. Although my dad never said we couldn't wear trousers, it was something subconsciously we never did...we were not trained to do it. I think when Asian parents see their daughter in trousers, they think 'Oh my God. My daughter is becoming wild' (Nighat, Interview 57).

When I first bought a pair of jeans -sixteen-seventeen-, my dad said he did not want me wearing them...I told him that I was not revealing anything. I put a long jumper on top. Up to this point, I was wearing shalwar kameez. I was no different than girls in Pakistan...trousers became jeans and the tunic became a jumper. It was literally the same thing but the fabric was different. My dad was finding it difficult to understand. Initially my parents fear was what people would say and how they would perceive you 'Look at her daughter, she is wearing skin-tight jeans. If she is wearing skin-tight jeans, then she must be X-Y-Z'. For dad, jeans symbolized everything westernized (Afia,¹⁴⁴Interview 60).

At home, I wore shalwar kameez, but at uni, I was experimenting a little, skirts and tops -nothing short-...if my parents saw me they would freak out... would transform myself before I went home (Mahnaz, Interview 70).

For me, this simple behavior of changing dress practices is an unexpected gesture of defiance. By resisting cultural discursive traditions and challenging familial clothing prohibitions, these women, much like American feminists in the 1920's and then 1950's,¹⁴⁵ are attempting to navigate through alternative space and experiment with a range of subjectivities,

¹⁴³ Amina is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #55.

¹⁴⁴ Afia is pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #60.

¹⁴⁵ See *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism* by Linda M. Scott, for a historical analysis on dress reform in the United States. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

including playing the role of normative “modern” British woman. What, if any, is the impact of this dress reform? For most, this performance occurs well outside the diasporic community borders. Women will transform themselves before returning to home and the community base. The ethnicity of the dress, British or “Indo-Pak,” signals the border between groups. Summarily, they strategically learn to regulate their dress and behavior within the spaces they move. Therefore, the individual acts have little consequence to group membership identity.

However, despite the rigor with which these women attempt to ensure East and West traditions remain separate and do not collide, the social boundaries are porous, and thus, there are moments of sartorial defiance making its way into community space. It is not surprising, then, wearing jeans brings community punitive responses ranging from embarrassment, to rancor and derision to what members consider an affront to tradition. One respondent is accused of not being a “good parent” because she dresses “westernized.” Another narrates her father’s shame:

I was wearing jeans at a time when it was not the done thing...one time, my dad and I were walking together to a grocery shop on the main Asian road in Blackburn, my dad stopped and I had carried on walking. I didn’t realize that he had stopped because he saw someone he knew and he didn’t want to be seen walking with me because I was in jeans and my hair was open... my dad would quite happily see me disappear off while he was talking to the other person (Bayan, Interview 13)

In a more extreme example, a family member physically punishes my collaborator for her impudence:

My uncles did not like the fact that women wear trousers. So when I reached 16, I became rebellious... I knew I was dressed Islamically with jeans and coat...trousers meant masculinity, trousers are for men; you should not imitate a man...my uncle hit me when her saw me at a fair wearing trousers (Yamna,¹⁴⁶Interview 66)

¹⁴⁶ Yamna is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #66)

Clearly, western fashion continues to play a divisive role and may not reduce tension between tradition and the modern in the community rhetoric. Simply put, the Asian community characterizes these women as a small minority who personify behavior that is antithetical to community norms, and appropriately, should be excluded from group membership. In doing so, the act of “putting on jeans” does not destabilize the cultural narrative that censures female appearance, but in contrast, stalls the empowerment project. For example, by attributing the shift in sartorial thinking to school settings, it reinforces the communities’ perception that girls should have limited access to education for fear of undue negative influence. A further result of marginalizing particular dress practices is it silences the voice of the wearer. Illustrating this point, Leena, a community worker relates a story where a client requested that Leena not visit her house dressed the way she dresses (in western clothes) for fear “the neighbors will talk.” The client was concerned about the presumed association with Leena (Leena,¹⁴⁷Interview 74). Alia sums it as the following: to be able to work and serve the Muslim community, one needs to be accepted as one of them. Therefore, one needs to be conscious of what one is wearing, and “cover-up” (Interview 7).

Additionally, I account a larger problem with the move to “modernize” by women choosing to adopt western clothes. I argue this enterprise continues to sustain the tradition/modern binary functioning within the dominant community discourse. It struck me, after one particular interview where Farzana described her daughter as “modern” because “she wears jeans” (Interview 47), the way women redirected colonial rhetoric to pigeonhole other women in their own community as either traditional or modern by the clothes they wear. In doing so, Farzana highlights the continuing tension between the western “modern” and the “non-

¹⁴⁷ Leena is pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #74.

modern” other, whereby a woman cannot be considered modern if she dresses traditionally. Like the following example, “We were never oppressed, Mum and Dad let us dress in Western clothes” (Saira and Saliha, Interview 49-50), many women in my research uncritically accept the western definition of what “modern” should be: secular, liberal, progressive, enlightened, and essentialize ethnic and religious fashioned clothing as ahistoric traditions, and exclude them from the category of “modern.” Therefore, although women “putting on jeans” are innovating previously unattainable meanings for themselves, they are still operating within a construct of polarities; they are making a unilateral move from tradition to modern. These British Muslim-Asian women are unable to unhinge the value system associated with secular, western clothes.

Putting on “Hijab”:

Many of the women I interviewed, realizing that by appropriating jeans as a form of dress, and by extension a Euro-centric ethos, may only advance their interests in their diasporic community in a limited way, choose to focus their sartorial attention instead on the visible expression of their religious identity. In spite of the negative semiotic preoccupation with Islamic dress outside the Muslim community, these women see “putting on hijab” as crucial in their attempt to disengage from community insularity, and to resist burdensome cultural mores and traditions. Readers should understand that wearing hijab is uncommon among first and second generation South Asian Muslim women, and therefore, the women I speak about are creatively engaging with a form of dress that at times may appear foreign to women in their own community. In a self-conscious negotiation with religion and culture, my interviewees as young women, drawing upon both the British majority culture and their ethnic and religious minority culture, began to re-imagine a hybridized British-Muslim identity that allows them to embrace a public performance of religion. Improvised in the local context, the strategy of adopting hijab

purposefully distances itself from their parents' home traditions, and additionally, from the homogenizing tendency of British fashion. These women attempt to re-constitute their own unique identity, whereby they replace the push to maintain cultural dress, and conversely, the desire for modern, secular clothes, with Islamic dress. Among the women I interviewed who wear hijab, for most, it was a personal choice often at odds with their parents' wishes. When Rabia started to wear hijab, for example, her mother loudly objected for fear that Rabia was "moving into another culture." She tells me: "She thought I was becoming an 'Arab' ...when you start following Islam, they make you out that you are being extreme" (Rabia, Interview 25). Echoing this thought, others repeat similar encounters with family members. It annoyed Mahnaz's mother to see Mahnaz wearing hijab and long dresses, because [she] believed it was not a "Pakistani identity, but an Arab thing, which [Mahanz] had taken on as [her] identity" (Interview 65). Shanu remembers her in-laws "calling her names," and accusing her of "going down the wrong path and becoming *Wahabi*." They were of the mindset that women should not even enter a mosque (Interview 58). Leena also starts to wear hijab after her father died. Scolding Leena, her mum chides: "What are you doing? You can't wear hijab...you are becoming fundamentalist." Wearing the hijab for about six months Leena cites her mother's disapproval as her reason for taking it off (Interview 74).

In contrast to reading dress through oppositions of Western and Asian, religion instead, shapes the clothing practices for these women. Intersecting in an alternative liberatory space, some British Muslim women are able to mediate cultural narratives, critique parental order and exercise control of their own bodily practices. Attesting to this point, Rabia concludes that operating in Britain is an independent space that makes it possible to distinguish between culture and "pure Islam" (Interview 25). Despite familial and communal reproach, women putting on

hijab affirm their Islamic identity, independent of cultural constructions. It is a way for these women to negotiate their public bodies on their own terms. Mostly by attending religious study circles at the university, there is an increasing awareness by these women that Islamic theology and Asian cultural mores at many times divert on different paths. Where “Indo-Pak” traditions limit bodily movement of women, Islam, in contrast, they find, accords equality to men and women, and so, divines the right to education, to choose one’s own marriage partner and permits women to engage within the public social space, in large part without doctrinal interference.

Inspired by the Qu’ranic injunction:

Oh Prophet, tell your wives and daughters, and believing women,
to draw their cloaks around them, so that they may be recognized
[or noticed] and not harmed (33:57) (Quoted in Tarlo 2007, 132),

the women choosing to wear hijab take on board the religious mandate to be seen but not seen, as a means to de-naturalize the social borders which contain these women. So whereas hijab is usually visual shorthand for the invisibility and effacement of Muslim women in the public space, these women are reviving and reframing hijab, as instead, a means to increase visibility of Muslim women in the public, despite the shrouding of certain parts of her body. For Shanu, “strength in religion gave her strength to speak up” (Interview 58). Organically, many of these British Muslim women upon re-discovering Islam, adopt the hijab to symbolize their commitment to their faith and their performance as British Muslim women. For example, Amina, after leaving home at seventeen, became religious and further adopted the niqab at age twenty. She sees it as a “natural step” in her religious quest. At age forty, still wearing niqab, in her words: ice skates, plays football with her children, bike rides, climbs mountains, and plays on the beach” (Interview 55). The constitutive effect of wearing hijab is that it enables a form of protest, a protest both against foreign intrusions, and internal debates of cultural authenticity.

Perceiving South Asian codes of conduct as primitive perversions of Islamic doctrine, the hijab serves these women an enabling device to forge a new way of being in the British context. The hijab is a mechanism, which belies the logic of tradition, and asserts a de-territorialized autonomous identity. In this context, religious dress communicates resistance to parochial cultural dress prescriptions and is a working tool to communicate their desire to be seen and heard (ironically in a piece of clothing which covers the head and body) in community space.

Although the hijab and shalwar kameez both maintain visible difference, encoded in the shalwar kameez is both the cultural value system and aesthetic sensibility of home. The shalwar kameez, and its complimenting accoutrements: chunni or dupatta (thin gossamer fabric draped loosely over the head and shoulders) represent their mother's aesthetic sensibilities, embody female codes of honor, and more so, communicate prohibitive roles for women. Thus, accordingly the women I interviewed are rejecting these clothing practices as too traditional and re-coding it as "un-Islamic." By adopting Islamic dress, these women aspire to depart from geographic-specific clothes and instead are attempting to ascribe to a global uniform of modesty. While still an expression of a moral dress code, the dress strategy to wear hijab makes an appeal for modesty while de-limiting the accompanying cultural narrative of seclusion and segregation. By focusing their attention on Islamic discourse and seeking doctrinal independence from their families, these women are able to define and contest what serves as boundary markers for religious, or conversely, cultural integrity and adopt what they perceive as "correct" religious attire.

The adoption of hijab then serves to re-work existing meanings associated with Asian clothes. Undermining familial and communal authority, and by making dress choices that are in opposition to such cultural prescripts, these women are agents of their own life choices. They

construct hijab as a tool of resistance by which they can challenge cultural prohibitions. By claiming to take a moral and religious high ground, my interviewees are able to negotiate access to public space, be it higher education, politics or employment. I note, for example, Salma Yaqoob, an elected councilor for the Respect Party, self-admittedly suggests that she garners support from the Muslim members of her Birmingham community partly because she wears hijab, and they see “I am married and a mum...and have not lost sight of their values” (Interview 29). Because Islamic dress continues to be circumscribed by the same cultural idioms that censure traditional female appearance, these women are able to manage the communal preoccupation with honor as the hijab still regulates female modesty and public behavior. It functions as a guarantor of respectability, and is a strategic way to ease themselves freely in mixed social spaces without threatening the social order and communal patriarchies.

A Move Towards “Islamic” Fashion:

With a more visible presence in the public sphere, British Muslim women are searching for ways to be more socially acceptable, and distance themselves from lingering stereotypes surrounding Islamic dress. These women are confronting three distinct challenges: First, to resist internal fixed cultural notions about how Muslim Asian women should look, dress and behave and to re-conceptualize what constitutes “Islamic uniform.” Second, to re-direct the western gaze so that the hijab does not represent the absolute truth of oppression. Lastly, to distance the narrative of the non-modern from women in Islamic dress and instead, be seen and read in hijab as a modern subject. The inclination to associate hijab with the non-modern shape both majority and minority discourse. In the community under study, for example, a number of respondents likened themselves as being “traditional” for choosing to wear hijab. Naima¹⁴⁸ for instance,

¹⁴⁸ Naima is a pseudonym. See Appendix for details on Interview #44.

describes her former self as “modern” because she “wasn’t wearing hijab” (Interview 44).

Naureen draws a similar distinction:

Wearing hijab was a turning point in my career...I was really conscious of the way they were going to look at me now. Up to that point, I was quite “modern”...I was up-to-date with the fashion and then, all of sudden I started to wear hijab. It was a struggle for me to continue for me to wear tight jeans with hijab... it was struggle for me to maintain my appearance with what it used to be. I felt that I couldn’t wear hijab and be fashionable at the same time (Interview 31).

Finding it difficult to square faith and fashion, many of these women choose to mitigate the material link between the two and toe the “traditional” line. Taking up this point where some are finding it difficult to reconcile religious dress with modernity, a number of British Muslim women are responding to the increased emergence of hijab in the British public space by re-conceptualizing what constitutes “Islamic” dress, and how best to express materially their new hybrid British-Muslim identity.

Shifting away from the conventional dichotomy: modern/traditional, a number of my interviewees are transforming Islamic dress behavior to reflect their modern self. At issue for these women is to contest two simultaneously occurring assertions, both, which place limits on clothing practices: First, fashion is superficial and belongs to the west. Second, Islamic dress does not sit easy with fashion, and therefore concluding, religiously conspicuous hijab is categorically not fashion, and in effect, does not belong in western space. What these women hope to achieve is to dislocate the geographical and philosophical borders one associates with Islamic dress, and develop a system of dress, which reflects both religion and parts of Western fashion (scarves, long skirts, jeans, long tunics). Borrowing a quote from author Alexandru Balasecu: “There are modern ways of looking at tradition and modern uses of traditional

clothes,”¹⁴⁹ I see the re-fashioning of Islamic dress codes, as simply this, as an appeal to the multiple possibilities of expressing modernity. Exemplifying the diasporic hybridizing of these two distinct dress codes are the sartorial biographies of three British-Muslim fashion designers. These women I write about are forging their own cultural space where Islamic fashion co-exists with the local system of fashion, British high street style, in this context.¹⁵⁰ Emerging from their own personal dilemmas of finding a lack of clothes that fit both their desire for contemporary western fashion and religious modesty, these designers are searching for ways to express their belonging to faith and British culture. Defining a new term of Britishness, their designs embody both religious virtue and a modern ideal of self-determination; these women want to be seen as making fashion choices.

I first encountered Maha at the Bordesley Centre (for a description of Bordesley Center, see chapter two) in Birmingham where she periodically sells hijabs and jilbabs/abaya (long coat/dress) that she designs. A child of working migrants from Pakistan, Maha (twenty-seven years old) started her business small, selling in women’s homes and community centers. Maha designs religious clothing in what she describes as “contemporary fashion.” By contemporary she means:

We are living in Britain and everyone is wearing every single color...there is no restriction for Muslim women in terms of colors she can wear. It is [her designs] for women who wear hijab and jilbabs and want to be comfortable in society. There are different styles: pocket style, bias cut, linens...I am trying to bring in whatever is in season into Islamic fashion, for example, linen is for summer.

¹⁴⁹ Alexandru Balasescu, “Haute Couture in Tehran: Two Faces of an Emerging Fashion Scene”. *Fashion Theory*, 11, No. 2-3 (2007): 302.

¹⁵⁰ My project follows in the footsteps of other scholars who have written on the global emergence of Islamic fashion. Authors include: Reina Lewis (2007); Annelies Moors (2007); Emma Tarlo (2010). Additionally, *Fashion Theory*, (11, no. 2-3, 2007) and the *Journal of Middle Eastern Women’s Studies* (6, no. 3, Fall 2010) devoted special issues on this subject.

Maha, primarily problematizes the religious fetish for black, and instead, seeks to allow a range of aesthetic choices for women choosing to cover themselves. She explains:

In Islam, some women hold the opinion that women should only wear black...I am trying to get rid of this concept – black is good, but dark colors are not the only correct colors – I have light colors...blue or dark colors such as plum... I am of the opinion that in the society you are living in you can merge ...if any girls wore the colors in my collections, they could walk outside and not stand out because everyone one of us is wearing all the colors (Interview 14).

With a background in fashion design, and having worked at Selfridges (high-end department store), Maha's objective is to "fill in the gap in the market" where Islamic dress currently only fulfills those women's needs seeking in the extreme (austere and black). She wants to accommodate women "who cover" so that they can be stylish, and further, so "non-Muslims and non-hijabis" will think her clothes are beautiful and seen as following "fashion trends." Re-working dress through fabric, colors, cuts and styles, Maha is "modernizing the Muslim woman through dress." She clarifies, however, it is not modernizing dress to "fulfill the idea of British modernism," but instead, a relational modernism which must remain "within the remits of Islam." Maha describes her design approach as perhaps a process of (re)modernizing dress:

You won't see my jilbabs with cap sleeves or raised hem or transparent. For example, with the linen piece, which can be transparent, I encourage sisters to wear a lace piece underneath...jilbabs are the outergarment...for the summer, we are making sleeveless dresses to wear underneath...you can wear anything underneath (Interview 14).

By developing her own sartorial strategy based on a set of Islamic principles converging on a western template, Maha signals her own "modern" take on fashion.

Growing her business on a more global scale is Sophia Kara of Imaan Collections.

Mirroring Maha's ethos, Sophia Kara also wants to inspire "faith-friendly" fashionable modesty

in her clothes. Of Indian heritage, Kara identifies herself as a “modern Muslim woman” who “rebels against Asian culture,” citing its gender inequities as a reason for her dissent. In her early twenties, she turned to Islam for inspiration and soon thereafter started to wear hijab. Finding only the choice of black abayas, “of poly-georgette fabric” on the market or “provocative Asian clothes,” Kara fashions clothes for religious-oriented “youngsters” to wear. Appealing to a younger consumer base (ages eighteen-thirty-five, fashion-conscious women), Kara’s designs seek to bridge high street mainstream fashion with modesty, making allowances for higher necklines, longer hemlines and voluminous fits. Offering choices in abaya styles (casual, professional, bridal), fabric, color and embellishment, Kara ensures her garments are the “conduits” for religious women to embrace both modesty and fashion. With its growing popularity, her designs are available on-line¹⁵¹ and additionally, she participates in Islamic fashion shows in Britain and the Middle East (Interview 62).

For a mode of dressing that is distinctly western, designer Sarah Elanany creates urban street wear which are “functional, stylish and Islamically modest.”¹⁵² Differing from Maha and Kara, Elanany does not design instantly recognizable Islamic dress, instead informed by hip-hop street style, her company sells long sleeved hooded tunics, dresses, jackets and coats, with repeated patterns of silk-screened graphics, inspired by Islamic art and culture. For example, a hooded long-sleeve tunic adorns a pattern of hands in prayer. The hood, which stands in replacement of the hijab, is an example of the way in which the loosely termed Islamic fashion can be interpreted. For Elanany, Islamic fashion is “modest clothing you can pray in,” and accordingly, she does not produce “Arabian looking clothing.” Instead she produces “British

¹⁵¹ See website <<http://www.imaancollections.com/islamic-fashion-clothing>> November 5, 2012

¹⁵² See website <<http://www.elanany.co.uk>> November 5, 2012

looking clothing which is more loosely cut and covers the right places;” clothes “which are relevant to the context in which they are being used in, for British Muslims” (Interview 76).

Frequently borrowing stylistic elements, and trends from Western fashion, these designers are part of a growing movement in the West, including social, television and print media,¹⁵³ who recognize and reflect this sartorial shift in the body politic. The changes in dress mirror the larger picture where Muslim women are no longer content in the margins, and visibly positioning themselves as active modern citizens in the British public. In this restaging of religion with fashion, we see the result of successful contestation and negotiations of Homi Bhabha’s¹⁵⁴ in-between terrain. Never belonging to one singular space, these designers are able re-position both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ to complicate the relationship between seemingly competing dress systems: British mainstream, and Islamic dress. The space in which these designers integrate modesty with fashion provides a useful example of the way in British-Asian Muslim women authorize both western discursive language and cultural tools in service of innovating diasporic style, and further, new sites of belonging in Western public space. Versed in ideas of multiculturalism, pluralism and individualism, these women are drawing on a range of sources, and negotiating and improvising traditional and modern cultural forms, to reveal the multiple possibilities of British modern identity and bodily practice in the public. So, while they frame their body as Muslim, they attempt to be “seen” as inclusive in the British body politic. In the interstices, these women can be visible and concealing (by their individual clothing choices) at the same time.¹⁵⁵ By consigning traditions to their mothers, they estrange themselves from

¹⁵³ See BBC Two documentary *Women in Black*. Fatima Salaria., Director, 2008; *MSLM Fashion* magazine from Netherlands; website <<http://hijabfashionista.wordpress.com>>_ August 30, 2012.

¹⁵⁴ For a more complete analysis, see Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994)

¹⁵⁵ The design of an Islamic-style swimsuit called the “Burkini,” for example is an innovative way to be active in public, and conceal the body without compromising one’s faith

serving as symbols of home, and instead, construct alternative femininities in the context of Western secular space, one that includes sacred Islam. By offering an alternative reading of Islamic dress, the women I interviewed re-work the ideological construction of hijab so that it blurs contesting spatial and social codes, and is no longer a currency of oppression nor sidelined to a discourse of exclusion. The resolve to let their fashion define their hybrid identity and relationship with the British public speaks to transformative potential of sartorial practices.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

At the start of this project, I wanted to place Islam squarely at the center of this research story. The desire was to see how an expressed religious identity materializes in the postcolonial British diasporic space. The goal was two-fold: First, to ask the question whether the material conditions of the diaspora lend themselves to the modern Islamic feminist project, thereby silencing critics who unfairly malign all Muslim women as oppressed. Second, I wanted to take on Samuel Huntington's presumptive "clash of civilizations" thesis to see if Islam can peacefully co-exist in the west despite the sounding alarms of the opposite. This well-intentioned objective of mine, however, shifted directions as the project took form on the ground. In the initial shaping of this undertaking, I unwittingly accepted a singular, homogenous narrative of Islam, a narrative that assumes the centrality of Islamic identity in my participants' lives, and further, failed to distinguish between the problematics of religion and problematics of culture.¹⁵⁶ Instead, I needed discursively to account for a bastardized/hybridized experience of religion, taking into consideration the way it intersects with a "local" culture and plumbs my participants into a cultural-specific space. Accordingly, the subjectivities of British, South Asian Muslim women have been, and continue to be determined by, in addition to religion, cultural codes produced in their unique locality. Therefore, it is disingenuous to draw over-arching conclusions about Islamic feminism without noting the cultural particularities of the community under study. By doing so, this project is a study of how British South Asian Muslim women contest and challenge what I describe as quiet cultural violence,¹⁵⁷ and how and why they assert Islamic

¹⁵⁶ On this point, it is useful to refer to Malise Ruthven's work which details historian Marshall Hodgson's distinction between "'Islamic' (pertaining to religion) and 'Islamicate' (pertaining to the broader cultural and societal frame of which the religion is part)" (Ruthven 1997, 11).

¹⁵⁷ Unjust cultural/social schema that regulates body and behavior to both deprive women in the community of choices and to legitimize gendered inequities.

identity away from the homeland and the discursive construction of an alternate feminine British-Muslim subject in the British public.

One of the difficulties of this project was to identify which social processes are rooted in unequal access to power and function to exclude British, Asian Muslims from national belonging. While I do not diminish the economic marginalization of the community under study, and the role it plays in constituting social identity and social inequities, nor do I mitigate state responsibility in increasing tension between majority and minority actors in Britain, I have argued that an undue focus on economic deprivation and racial politics narrowly reduces the picture to one set of variables. Therefore, while Muslim women, like their male counterparts, are negotiating exclusions in the labor market, politics, media etc., their limited access to the aforementioned institutions such as employment, are less significant in determining why Muslim women are unable to advance their interests. Instead, as I have said, it is the everyday cultural scripts circulating in the Asian community that circumscribe the rules of comportment for South Asian Muslim girls and women. Living in what I define as “cultural ghettos,” an ideological shrine to an imagined “home” is constructed to contain women within communal physical and mental boundaries. Functioning within this site is a moral narrative, which adjoins cultural integrity with fixed notions about gender relations, resulting in an inherited system of practice which nurtures spatial isolation, regulates body and behavior with militancy, compels endogamous domestic arrangements, and furthers economic and education exclusion from the mainstream.

This cultural dogma remains an enduring holdover, despite its long travel from home to postcolonial Britain, and is deeply rooted in the formation of the South Asian-Muslim subject position. The structural foundation of this dogma inscribing the lives of the women I interviewed

communicates an essentially “different from the West” ethos, delineates imaginary borders, and fashions the body accordingly. This research is about defining these socio-spatial structures, but it also stands witness to an internal indictment to what my participants classify an encumbered primordial identity. The genesis of this unparalleled British-Muslim subject position starts with a paradigm shift whereby these women do not singularly identify with one identity (British, Muslim and Asian) and cannot be sustained within a paradigm of difference. So while, they take issue with the construction of “Britishness” around Christianity and/or “whiteness,” they also contest implicit assumptions of having an uncomplicated connection to “home” (Indian sub-continent). In truth, many of these women disconnect with their parents’ nostalgic discourse, finding their parents’ insecurities of loss of home unrelatable. Undeniably a consequence of living in the diaspora, my participants inhabit and move within multiple spaces outside the local context, and in doing so, negotiate, construct, and articulate alternative possibilities of identification that reach beyond the confines of physical and mental borders established by traditional cultural discourse.

British Islam

This study then, is a story of the multiple sides of subject formation, the ways in which immigrant practice, cultural and religious, and the norms of British civil society operate in relation, each responding to the other. It offers a new possibility beyond “us/them,” “East/West,” or “occident/orient” dichotomous divides, by suggesting there is a place for Islam in public Britain. This study is about the way diasporan aesthetics takes on the politics of contesting definitions of identity, and the way it lends itself to the project of unsettling cultural constructions of religion, and to the further development of a modern British Islam. Filtered through multiple discursive traditions, and with access to more than one cultural idiom, a

generation of British-born Muslims, in contrast to their parents, is producing a more complex form of belonging, an identity which affirms their British and religious hybridity, and for young women, an alternative gendered identity. By asserting their compound identity (British-Muslim), these women de-stabilize their filial connection to home, and expand the boundaries of British identity, thereby challenging the narrative opposition between “British,” “Asian” and “Muslim.”

I liken “British-Islam” to a modern reforming religious movement, operating on two concurrent planes. At the macro level, British Islam is a mediating mechanism to splinter the public/private divide, and for those seeking to discursively challenge the discourse of exceptionalism beleaguering Muslims in Britain, to bridge the distance between the religious minority and the non-religious majority in Britain. A key function for these women is merge Islam and the West so that both are fluid and no longer separate and hostile, and to create a sacred space in the public which can successfully integrate the principles of Islam with the demands of modernity, to normalize Muslim identity in the mainstream. The women in my study achieve this, I believe, through the selective appropriation of Western structural processes: education, media and cultural capital such as art,¹⁵⁸ music and fashion. Take, for example, my findings on Muslim media. Instead of adopting a wholesale prohibition of Western media as suggested by some puritans,¹⁵⁹ reformists construct a counter space in the national context to undercut the dominant representations and narrow views of their community and religion in

¹⁵⁸ Graffiti Artist Mazzy Malik, for example, incorporates distinct British national symbols, such as the Union Jack with Islamic calligraphy to produce a visible expression of her citizenship and religion. (Interview 75. For details see Appendix)

¹⁵⁹ Some puritans decry all Western media outlets as “propaganda in a war against Islam”. According to al-Muharijoun (banned Islamist organization in Britain) “the primary mission of the media is to obfuscate the call to Islam and justice, by misrepresenting Islamic movements, distorting the truth, and sowing lies. It is an instrument of Western cultural imperialism, a vehicle for disseminating Western values and supporting Zionist and Crusader industries that weaken resistance to Western assimilation, such as fashion, cosmetics and pornography (Quoted in Wiktorowicz 2005, 155).

mainstream media. The new Muslim media (television shows, magazines) reflects a Muslim aesthetic and enables Muslims, or specifically for my objective, Muslim women to recognize herself, to express their views, debates issues of concern, strengthen connections, encourage dialogue and develop their own sense of being British and Muslim.

It is important to emphasize that mainstreaming Muslims in this context does not suggest a rejection of Islamic identity, or as others fear, the erosion of secularism, but instead, British-Islam plays a role in normalizing expressions of piety in a secular space so that it includes Muslims in the national conversation. This is most evident in the emergence of Islamic fashion (chapter 4). If hijab and other forms of austere religiously inspired dress (niqab, jilbab) are metonyms for Islam, then Islamic fashion designers are attempting to decolonize dominant meanings so that a Muslim woman's covered body could also be read as thoroughly British. By re-working Islamic dress to integrate current fashion from British high street, Islamic fashion designers are finding ways to mobilize dress to demonstrate what Britishness may look like or what a Muslim woman may be. Moving towards this complex understanding of public performance of religion signals the possibility that western modernity is not antithetical to religious morality, or conversely, visible religious identity does not preclude a modern public self. So while, her veiled body frames her as Muslim, her clothes, informed by Western fashion plot a different story: she is at once both, Muslim and British.

Moving towards “Feminism”

Moving to the micro-local level, I interpret the move to British-Islam as also a measure of protest against imported ethnic tradition. It is a self-conscious negotiation against cultural ambivalence to re-invent what makes this new generation distinctly “Muslim.” This reformist project militates for a new and theorized practice of Islam by questioning existing intellectual

authority (imams exported from home), and relying on re-reading textual evidence (Qu'ran) to construct an alternative space for "British-Islam." So where religion and culture compete and collide in the locality, and when one encounters an incoherence of ideas, there is reliance on textual authority to refute cultural practices.

It is within this context of heightened consciousness that the women I interviewed are engaging with modes of feminism to address the politics of tradition within the Muslim diasporic community. I should confess, however, that I take liberties with defining their motives as feminist. My participants have never defined themselves or their acts of resistance as "feminist," and perhaps would be uncomfortable with claiming such ownership. I rely on my own interpretation of feminism to draw conclusions for this project, and accordingly, implicate Islamic feminism as an appendix to British Islam. Like the larger reform movement, feminists/activists assert that by maintaining material and symbolic links with cultural traditions of the imagined homeland it leads to social disintegration, and therefore, to produce equitable social relations they need to promote a re-definition of Muslim female identity. They believe where culture silences women, literally and figuratively, Islam in contrast, gives voice to women, according them equal rights. By performing a second reading of Islam, their objective, then, is adjusting normative traditional behavior by de-emphasizing cultural language and emphasizing textual language i.e., Qu'ran.

Seizing the principles of Islamic feminism/reformism, a number of individual and organizations (e.g., Muslim Women's Network, An-Nisa Society), empowered by revival textualism, are protesting against community coherence which can insulate female minors from education, and can continue systematic cultural practices of marrying cousins and forced marriages. By professing a command of "true Islam," these women are gently pushing against

gender prescriptions to counter-weight cultural authority and offering new possibilities of being as shown, for example, by developing and utilizing women-only social spaces outside the private home and by claiming autonomous decision-making spaces for themselves. Within this context, textual authority is giving incremental advances whereby these women are undermining the “community gaze” by asserting their right to choose their marriage partners, the right to work and to be educated, the right to move around in public and the right to negotiate their public bodies, through dress, for example, on their own terms.

Public Policy Implications

I mean for this project to provoke discussion on how best to integrate Muslim sensibilities into the public collective. So while, the focus of this research is South Asian Muslim women in Britain, I would argue that my work deserves some concluding remarks on how to reduce conflict between the British majority and Muslim minority populations living in the West. First, drawing attention to the question of integration, I contend that assimilation and integration are false debates because it remains on the state’s terms. There is a moral imperative by the state to control immigrant bodily practice to ensure social reproduction of its national identity. In Britain, for example, secularism operates at the exclusion of religious practice in the public. By elaborating Islam as incommensurable with British norms, the state marginalizes those citizens for whom religion is a primary identity. Here, I am content to rely on Farisa’s response on how to define integration:

Integration is being part of a community – wider or smaller...being able to participate wherever you live, feel that there is space for you to fit in. The key is joining in the community but not to the detriment to your faith (Interview 22).

Integration, then, hinges upon the recognition of all forms of belonging that inform a subject’s everyday life and upon the idea that one’s sense of identity does not have to be traded in to be

considered “acceptable.” On this point, I will secondly consider how multiculturalism policy lends itself to my research. Some argue that effectually multicultural policies are to blame for sustaining social insularity thereby creating cultural ghettos, which in turn, nourishes cultural particularities that ultimately hurt women in local communities. Perhaps there is some truth to this objection, alternatively however, I believe multiculturalism as a policy can succeed if it is bolstered by supportive policies. For example, multiculturalism celebrates diversity, and yet, the conception of modern citizenship relies on individual sameness. The problem is that by naturalizing categories of identity: race, religion, ethnicity and gender, it reduces complex realities to a fixed simplistic notion of what or who is British. I argue, instead, for the need, within a general framework of commonality, to pluralize national identity so as to include and tolerate difference, particularly religious difference in the body politic. Highlighting my point, at a community cohesion seminar in Birmingham that I attended, a seminar participant, in attempting to make a moral case for cultural diversity, articulated the following narrative:

A BBC journalist asks a girl from Bradford, whose parents are from Pakistan, how she identifies herself. Her response: “When I am on the playground with my white school friends, I am Black. When an Afro-Caribbean girl joins the group, I am Asian. When a Pakistani girl joins the group, I am Mir Puri. When a Mir Puri joins the group, I am a girl from Bradford.

The premise is that multiple identities do matter and thus civil society needs to recognize heterogeneity. If migrant communities feel a sense of national belonging, then it follows, they will be less likely to remain psychologically dependent on “home” and less likely to engineer cultural ghettos.

Lastly, I look to the transformative potential of the diaspora. I argue that the “crisis of Islam in the West” (if we are to assume there is one) can be resolved with alternative diasporic identification. Lessons can be learned from the women in my study who are able to contest

discursive categories, interrogate cultural narratives, and reconceptualize ideas of resistance and agency by drawing on an alternative Islamic diaspora to construct a new gendered British-Muslim identity. Their fluid movement between local borders offers an example of how to integrate faith and citizenship in a secular state.

Appendix

Interviews – All names are pseudonyms

1. Interview held on July 17, 2007 at Birmingham Museum of Art with Tanveer, a 30 year-old British-Pakistani woman. Profession – artist.
2. Interview held on July 19, 2007, with Nilofer, a 41year-old British-Pakistani married woman, at her home. Profession – Part-time PhD student in Islamic Theology.
3. Interview held on July 23, 2007, at the office of Ulfah Arts, with Nadia, a 31-year-old, self – identified Muslim-English-Punjabi woman. Profession – artist.
4. Interview held on July 27, 2007, at the office of Ulfah Arts, with Shaheen, a 31-year -old Pakistani woman. Profession – works at Ulfah Arts.
5. Interview held on July 27, 2007, at the office of Ulfah Arts, with Batul, a 32-year old, married British-Pakistani woman. Profession- solicitor.
6. Interview held on July 31, 2007, at the Bordesley Center, with Samah, an over-25-year old British Muslim woman. Profession- performs administrative work at the Bordesley Center.
7. Interview held on August 14, 2007, at the Bullring Birmingham, with Alia, a 23-year-old British-Pakistani woman. Profession – local community activist.
8. Interview held on August 16, 2007, at the Bordesley Center, with Ravina, a 25 year-old British-Muslim woman. Profession – works at the Bordesley Center.
9. Interview held on September 10, 2007, at the Bordesley Center, with Sonia, a 31-year-old British-Muslim, married woman. Profession – works at the Bordesley Center.
10. Interview held on September 12, 2007, at the Bullring Birmingham, with Hafsa, a 25-year-old Muslim-Pakistani-British, married woman.
11. Interview held on September 17, 2007, at Saheli group office, with Naseem, a 39-year- old British-Pakistani-Kashmiri woman. Profession – founder of Saheli Project.
12. Interview held on September 18, 2007, at the Bullring Birmingham, with Rabina, a 35-year-old British-Muslim woman. Profession - Neighborhood Coordinator at local school.
13. Interview held on September 25, 2007, with Bayan, a 29-year-old Muslim woman, at her home in Blackburn, UK. Parents emigrated from India. Profession – PhD, local community activist, radio personality on Unity FM.

14. Interview held on September 27, 2007, at the Bordesley Center, with Maha, a 27-year-old Muslim woman. Parents are working immigrants from Punjab, Pakistan. Profession- hijab designer.
15. Group interview held October 3, 2007, at the Bordesley Center, with Maria, age 18, Amina, age 23 and Asiya, age 18. Profession- students.
16. Interview held on October 4, 2007, at the Saheli group office, with Zakia, a 26-year-old British-Pakistani married woman. Profession- Development Officer at Saheli group.
17. Interview held on October 8, 2007, at the Bullring Birmingham, with Farah, a 21-year-old Muslim-British-Pakistani woman. Profession- student
18. Interview held on October 9, 2007, at the Bordesley Center, with Nazneen, a 28-year-old-British- Muslim woman. Parents migrated from Pakistan. Profession – graphic designer.
19. Interview held on October 10, 2007, at the Bordesley Center with Mahreen, a 25-year-old-British-Muslim woman. Profession- performs administrative work at the Bordesley Center.
20. Interview held on October 12, 2007, at the Sparkhill Community Center with Ambareen, a 46-year-old British-Pakistani married woman. Profession - community development worker at the Sparkhill Community Center.
21. Interview held on October 15, 2007 at McDonalds with Tania, a 22-year-old British-Asian-Muslim woman. Profession – service worker at McDonalds.
22. Interview held on October 16, 2007 at the Bordesley Center with Farisa, a 28-year-old British-Pakistani-Muslim married woman. Profession - nursery care worker at the Bordesley Center.
23. Interview held on October 19, 2007 at the Bullring Birmingham, with Shazia, a 38-year-old British-Pakistani woman. Profession- member of the Muslim Woman’s Network UK (MWNUK).
24. Interview held on October 20, 2007, with Khadija, a 40-year-old British-Pakistani married woman, at her home. Profession-artist.
25. Interview held on October 22, 2007, at a coffee shop in London, with Rabia, a 36-year-old Pakistani-Muslim married woman. Profession- artist.
26. Interview held on October 24, 2007, at the Bullring Birmingham, with Rukhaya, a 28-year-old British-Muslim married woman. Parents migrated from Kashmir, Pakistan. Profession - theater performance.

27. Interview held on October 26, 2007, at the Roshni Women’s Center, with Rania, a 34-year-old British-Asian woman. Profession - community care worker at Asian domestic violence shelter.
28. Interview held on October 30, 2007, at the Birmingham Mailbox, with Nida, a 23-year-old Mir-Puri woman.
29. Interview held on November 2, 2007, with Salma Yaqoob, a British-Pakistani, married woman, at her home. Profession - elected councilor for Respect Party
30. Interview held on November 5, 2007, at BBC Birmingham offices, with Sabah, a 30-year-old British-Pakistani married woman. Profession - broadcast journalist at BBC Asian Network.
31. Interview held on November 6, 2007, at the Balsall Heath Community Center, with Naureen, a 35-year-old British-Pakistani married woman. Profession – position “Community Development Coordinator.”
32. Interview held on November 7, 2007, at the Sparkbrook Community Center, with Zainab, a 51-year-old married woman. Immigrated to Britain from Pakistan when she was 10. Profession - community specialist officer.
33. Interview held on November 11, 2007, in a London coffee shop, with Amina, a 20-something year-old woman. Profession: artist.
34. Interview held on November 13, 2007, at the An-Nisa Society office, with Humera, a 47-year-old British-Muslim married woman. Born in Karachi, Pakistan, immigrated to London in 1962. Profession- founded An-Nisa Society.
35. Interview held on November 15, 2007, with Shama, a 43-year-old British-Pakistani woman, in her home in Manchester, UK. Profession- poet.
36. Interview held on January 8, 2008, at the Birmingham Mailbox, with Nasia, a 30-year-old Muslim-British-Bangladeshi woman. Profession- Graduated with a PhD from Cambridge University, and is an assistant producer at BBC Birmingham.
37. Interview held on January 10, 2008, at the Bordesley Center, with Isha, a 22-year-old British-Muslim married woman. Her father emigrated from Islamabad, at age 14. Mother was forced to marry her father (her cousin), at age 18. Profession- student in Islamic studies and theology.
38. Interview held on January 15, 2008, at the Bordesley Center, with Azkaa, a 26-year-old, self-defined “British” woman. Immigrated from Attock, a conservative village in Punjab, Pakistan at age 10. Profession – performs administrative work at the Bordesley Center.
39. Interview held on January 16, 2008, at the Bullring Birmingham, with Rehana, a 25 year-old Muslim-British-Asian-Bengali woman. Profession - social enterprise coordinator helps build female-focused business in the local community.

40. Interview held on January 28, 2008, at the Friends of Regent's Park Elementary School, with Mina, a 29 year-old British-Pakistani married woman. Profession: stay-at-home mom.
41. Interview held on January 28, 2008, at the Friends of Regent's Park Elementary School, with Rabia, a 46-year-old Pakistani-Muslim married woman. Profession: stay-at-home mom.
42. Interview held on January 28, 2008, at the Friends of Regent's Park Elementary School, with Shaista, a 31-year-old Muslim-British-Pakistani married woman. Profession: stay-at-home mom.
43. Interview held on January 28, 2008, at the Friends of Regent's Park Elementary School, with Shahana, a Muslim-British married woman. Profession: stay-at-home mom.
44. Interview held on January 28, 2008, at the Friends of Regent's Park Elementary School, with Naima, a British-Asian married woman. Profession: stay-at-home mom.
45. Interview held on January 28, 2008, at the Friends of Regent's Park Elementary School, with Shamim, a 40-year-old British-Muslim married woman. Parents immigrated to Britain from New Duddial, Pakistan, in early 1960's. Profession: stay-at-home mom.
46. Interview held on February 5, 2008, at BBC London office, with Rima, a 45-year-old British Pakistani married woman. Profession: BBC journalist.
47. Interview held on February 8, 2008, at the Sparkhill Women's Center with Farzana, a 39-year-old British-Pakistani married woman. Profession: community activist.
48. Interview held on February 9, 2008, at the Canary Wharf in London, with Samina, a 38-year-old Indian (by way of Zimbabwe) woman. Profession: freelances at Al-Jazeera.
- 49 & 50. Group interview held on February 15, 2008 at Birmingham City Council office, with Saira, age 26, Saliha, age 22 and Nargis (married), age 22. All are British-Pakistani women. Profession: all work for Birmingham City Council on the "Muslimah in Action" project.
51. Interview held on February 20, 2008 at the BBC London office, with Mishal Hussain, a 35-year-old British-Pakistani married woman. Profession: BBC journalist.
53. Interview held on February 24, 2008, with Summaya, a 40-year-old British-Pakistani woman, at her home in Manchester, England. Profession: Northwest reporter for BBC Asian programming unit for greater Manchester and Lancashire.
54. Interview held on February 27, 2008 at the Bullring Birmingham, with Sana, a 29-year-old British-Muslim woman. Profession: involved in local politics with the Respect Party.
55. Interview held on March 7, 2008, at the Bullring Birmingham, with Amina, a 40-year-old British-Muslim married woman. Amina wears *niqab*.. Profession: works for the Dolly Project, which provides assistance to victims of forced marriages.

56. Group interview held on March 21, 2008, at the Islam Channel office in London, with Aliya, age 24, Sadia, age 35 and Hafeesa, age 25. Profession: hosts of the “City Sisters,” a lifestyle television program on the Islam Channel.
57. Interview held on March 25, 2008, at the Right Start Foundation office, with Nosheen, a 29-year-old British-Pakistani-Muslim woman. Profession: counselor for Sakeena Women’s Project, which provides support to women from ethnic minority communities affected by their family members’ drug use.
58. Interview held on April 2, 2008, at the Friends of Regent’s Park Elementary school, with Shanu, a 32-year-old, British-Asian divorced woman. Profession: stay-at-home mom.
59. Interview held on April 3, 2008, with Habiba, a 35-year-old British-Pakistani married woman, in her home, in Balsall Green, Birmingham. Profession: stay-at-home mom.
60. Interview held on April 4, 2008, at the Friends of Regent’s Park Elementary school, with Afia, a 38-year-old British-Pakistani divorced woman. Currently is in a polygamous relationship with an already married man. Profession: runs a mobile hair salon.
61. Interview held on April 8, 2008, at the Bullring Birmingham, with Rana, a 30-year-old British-Asian-Muslim married woman. Profession: lawyer, dealing with issues of domestic violence and at-risk teens. Every Monday, she holds study circles where her clients can ask a religious authority their unanswered questions about religion.
62. Interview held on April 10, 2008, in the Birmingham City Center, with Jamia, a 38-year-old British-Muslim-Bangladeshi married woman. Profession: counselor
63. Interview held on April 16, 2008, at the Birmingham City Hospital, with Rukhsana, a 49-year-old British-Muslim woman. Immigrated from Punjab, Pakistan to Britain at age 2. Profession: counselor and psychotherapist.
64. Interview held on April 23, 2008, with Baroness Manzila Pola Uddin, a 48-year-old British-Muslim- Bangladeshi married woman, in her office in London. Profession: British Labour politician.
65. Interview held on April 25, 2008, with Hanaa, a 28-year-old British-Indian woman, at a friends’ home.
66. Interview held on April 28, 2008, at the Bullring Birmingham, with Yamna, a 23 year-old British-Muslim woman. Profession: student.
67. Interview held on May 1, 2008, with Sophia Kara, a British-Muslim-Indian woman, at her home. Profession: fashion designer for Imaan Collections.

68. Interview held on May 2, 2008, at the Ashram office, with Munia, a 39-year-old British-Bangladeshi married woman. Profession: community worker at Ashram, an organization founded to meet the needs of South Asian families in the Midlands.
69. Interview held on May 5, 2008, in the Sainsbury cafeteria, with Seema, a 28-year-old British-Asian divorced woman. Profession: works in the police force.
70. Interview held on May 8, 2008, at the Bullring Birmingham, with Mahnaz, a 29-year-old Muslim, British woman. Profession: theater and music performer at Ulfah Arts.
71. Interview held on May 12, 2008, at a community center on Coventry Road, with Noor, a 24-year-old British married woman. Parents immigrated to Britain from Pakistan. Profession: runs a women's organization that aims to educate Muslim women about their rights.
72. Interview held on May 14, 2008, at the Emel office in London, with Ramona Ali, deputy editor of Emel magazine.
73. Interview held on May 15, 2008, at the Ashram office, with Nylah, a 32-year-old Pakistani woman. Profession: community worker at Ashram.
74. Interview held on May 15, 2008, at the Ashram office, with Leena, a 28 year-old Pakistani married woman. Profession: community worker at Ashram.
75. Interview held on January 15, 2010, with Mazzy Malik in her home. Profession: artist.
76. Interview by e-mail on February 24, 2010, with Sarah Elenany, a 28-year old British-Muslim woman. Profession: Islamic fashion designer.
77. Attended and taped workshop held on October 11, 2007. Muslim-Asian women from different community organizations in Birmingham gathered to brainstorm ideas and ways for women to engage in community leadership.
78. Focus group held on January 22, 2008, at the Balsall Heath Community Center, with a group of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, ranging from ages 21-38 years old. Professions: stay-at-home moms.

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