

Individuals, Collectives, Sisters:
Vernacular Cosmopolitan Praxis Among Muslim Women in Transnational Cyberspaces

by

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Abstract

This dissertation research analyzes the vernacular cosmopolitan praxis of Muslim women in transnational cyberspaces related to topical and collective action networks, in an effort to detangle cosmopolitanism from its Western biases and to move away from studies of online Muslim populations based on geographical locations or homogenous networks, linking individuals through their religious practices or consumption of religious knowledge. Through highlighting praxes rather than contexts, this dissertation disrupts the East/West binary and challenges stereotypes ascribed to Muslim women. One of the research questions related to the cosmopolitan praxis of Muslim women is the following: in what ways do Muslim women engage with “others” online and contribute to bridging dissimilar people? Findings suggest that the social media use of Muslim women contributes to their subtle resistance against communal norms and, although it can serve as an extension to their voices, some of their voices are more readily mediated than others.

I employ a connective content analysis methodology to put various datasets associated with topics and collective actions related to Muslim women into conversation. The methodology not only highlights consistencies in the qualitative themes that were iteratively developed through the analyses of the datasets, but also more tangible connections related to social media users, topics, and content. Consequently, this thesis is as much concerned with recasting Western-oriented conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism as it is with how networks dynamics foster and constrain cosmopolitan praxis because digital networks have the extraordinary capacity to link dissimilar people beyond any other type of medium. One of the research questions related to the methodology is: how do network dynamics facilitate and constrain cosmopolitan praxis?

The substantive chapters related to the datasets discuss various forms of cosmopolitan praxis that were identified in the analysis: social media use by Muslim women that expands the connective memory, which could contribute to dispelling stereotypes ascribed to them; activism that addresses universal concerns related to women's rights regardless of context; dialogically devising basic standards of social conduct and gender relations; and expressions of tolerance toward divergent views, including alternative interpretations of Islamic beliefs and practices.

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A THEMATIC CODES FOR HARASSMAP 360

Introduction

I've never told this story before. My first recollection of being sexually harassed was when I was 10 or 11 years old. I was at the beach, swimming, when a strange man I had never seen before, put his hand inside my swimsuit and repeatedly pinched my vagina, while he smiled at me. I was confused, didn't know how to understand what he did. I thought he must be a friend of my parents, but when I swam to the shore and told them, my dad went in and beat the guy, almost drowning him. It was the only time I saw my dad beat a man.¹ (Menna)

“Menna” offered this narrative on the HarassMap *Facebook* page in conjunction with the online “End Sexual Harassment” campaign, which resulted in hundreds of blog postings, *Facebook* entries, and Tweets from Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian, and Sudanese social media users.² A campaign of this magnitude not only demonstrates the pervasiveness of the issue but also that it would be difficult to accomplish offline, particularly the transnational aspect of the campaign. Social media provide Muslim women spaces to share their voices and to collectivize around issues that affect women everywhere.

“Menna” uses the opportunity to share a story that she has kept to herself perhaps due to embarrassment or because social norms make the subject taboo. Cyberspaces allow women to collectively share their experiences and, as the title of this dissertation suggests, I am interested in ways that Muslim women engage online as individuals, groups and networks, and as women.

Background of Problem

The participation of the women in the 2011 Arab Revolts as well as the growing influence of female Muslim scholarship and activism have made it increasingly difficult to maintain the well-rehearsed stereotype of the submissive Muslim woman, or cooke's (2007) Muslimwoman (see Chapter 1). Although the opinions of Muslim women

¹https://www.facebook.com/HarassMapEgypt/posts/349748891763757?comment_id=2892388&offset=0&t

²<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/14618.aspx>

continue to be underrepresented in political, religious, and media discourses and in association with how they situate their allegiances to local and global communities, which are sometimes rendered as mutually exclusive, Muslim women's use of social media has contributed to dispelling various widely held beliefs about Muslim women and their enduring status as victims (Cooke, 2000), including what is perceived as self-imposed victimization through their affiliation with Islam. Prior to the advent of social media, when Muslim women were not being stereotyped in conventional media they were largely ignored due to their conspicuous absence in existing power structures. This dissertation research attempts to situate topics and collective actions related to Muslim women, particularly those that frame universal issues related to women's rights, to determine the extent to which they convey cosmopolitanism.

The term cosmopolitanism is associated with the processes of global interconnectedness and with the propagation of universal norms (Beck, 2004; 2011; Beck & Sznaider, 2006). Cosmopolitanism not only addresses the possibility of universal standards but it is also considered an enviable identity trait among Westerners and academics, alluding to sophistication, affluence, and worldliness (Hannerz, 1996). Since Muslim women appear to be addressing universal issues affecting women's rights, like sexual harassment, their social media use veers toward a form of cosmopolitanism; however, despite the broad range of conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism, there is little mention of Muslim women, Arabs, and Muslims in associated literature.

Statement of Problem

Cosmopolitanism implies movements toward universality, so it has the potential to be an important guiding principle in the highly interconnected current era. Yet, despite

this potential, cosmopolitanism has historically and contemporarily been tied Western consciousness and values, compromising the universalism of the cosmos in favor of conformity to Western social, political, and economic ontologies and cultural colonialism. Muslim women lack access to the affiliation because, due to the aforementioned stereotype of the Muslimwoman (cooke, 2007), they are often perceived as the antithesis of liberated Westerners and ambivalent to Western values. Their exclusion from the ranks of cosmopolitans may not only be associated with Eurocentricism of the term, particularly within Western academic circles, but also related to how Muslim populations are examined in scholarship, especially online populations, which are of central interest to this dissertation.

Studies of Muslims in online spaces tend to reify a singular unified Muslim community, a theoretical position that I refute throughout this dissertation but particularly in Chapter 5, perhaps because they focus on specific homogenous groups (“homophilic networks”) that subscribe to traditional Islamic authority and Qur’anic hermeneutics (see Bunt, 2004). This is not simply related to the preference of Muslims for traditional perspectives on Islam but because scholars tend to study popular websites and, since network dynamics tend to favor websites that have a longer history on the internet and those that are linked to the most, these websites may be popular because many people are linking to them in support of and in opposition to the articulated claims therein. Further, scholars may fall prey to the assumptions outlined, for example, in Huntington’s (1993) “Clash of Civilizations” and highlight the incompatibility between Islamic and Western worldviews in their analyses based on these homogeneous networks. Thus the less authoritative voices of Muslims, especially Muslim women, on personal blogs, who do

not claim the title of mufti, as well as discussions between Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims in transnational cyberspaces are often ignored in academic research. To move away from the focus on Western cosmopolitanism based on geography and identities and studies of Muslim populations in homogenous online networks, I propose the study of vernacular cosmopolitan praxis among Muslim women in transnational cyberspaces.

Literature Review

In ancient times, cosmopolitanism was framed as commitment to both one's local community and the "cosmos," or humanity as a whole (Kleingeld, 2006). Although the origins of the idea of cosmopolitanism denoted an ethical consideration for humankind, it was co-opted by leaders during early Christianity and, later when it became a fashionable theoretical framework among Enlightenment philosophers, to advance Christianity and Western ideals and superiority under European colonialism. In contemporary literature, the word cosmopolitan is often linked to the identity of certain people who are tolerant of multiculturalism or the multi-ethnic configuration places (Calhoun, 2008).

Cosmopolitanism is also theorized as processes and issues that connect the "cosmos" (Beck, 2004; 2011), or all people from different places and cultures around the world.

Literature related to cosmopolitanism also questions the viability of supranational structures of global governance, reviving Kant's affinity for this type of cosmopolitan project (Dallmayr, 2012; Beck, 2004). Contemporary conceptualizations have attempted to reposition cosmopolitanism as universalism, rather than Eurocentricism, but the absence of certain groups of people in studies related cosmopolitanism perhaps unwittingly implies that the epicenter of the ideal continues to reside in Western locales

or among people who have adopted Western consciousness and/or identities. Under contemporary globalization shaped by the Washington Consensus,³ global culture has moved toward greater homogeneity to the extent that societies (and individuals by association) that deviate from hegemonic norms must constantly justify their motivations for non-compliance.

Scholarship perhaps continues to reflect the us/them dynamic in regard to cosmopolitanism, particularly because cosmopolitanism is often linked to (Western) identity. Most populations described as cosmopolitan are either Westerners or non-Westerners living in the West. In contrast, Muslims and Arabs are not often rendered as cosmopolitans due the stereotypes ascribed to them and, when they are mentioned in literature, they are typically marked as “anti-cosmopolitans” (Beck & Sznaider, 2006), like those responsible for the September 11 and July 7 attacks, because religious, political, and national identities that counter Western norms are all forms of guilt by association, particularly in the age of global terror. While some scholars point out that anti-cosmopolitanism can also exist in the West among Westerners (Blaagaard, 2010), the lack of studies that locate cosmopolitanism outside of the West suggests that Arabs and Muslims are guilty of anti-cosmopolitanism by association because Western rhetoric related to Islam often perceives it in monolithic terms and emphasizes the inherent violence of the religious culture. Rendered in these terms, cosmopolitanism simply becomes another form of othering to mark the binary cosmopolitan/anti-cosmopolitan, which appears counterintuitive to the general aim of cosmopolitanism—different people respecting each other through a shared sense of humanity.

³ The Washington Consensus promotes the American/European model of societal-governmental relations, including individualism, democracy, secularity, and free market capitalism.

As mentioned above, some of the discussions and forms of activism in my data suggest that Muslim and Arab Muslim women are exhibiting cosmopolitanism, related to the ancient conceptualization rather than the Eurocentric Christian colonialist version, in their social media use. The efforts of Muslim women, enabled through social media, bridge cultures, iteratively devise basic standards of comportment, engage universal issues related to women's rights, and encourage local-global dialogue and change. I frame these actions and interactions as vernacular cosmopolitan praxis; in other words, behaviors that demonstrates dedication to local and global communities, similar to glocal or global-local activism (Beck, 2002). Rather than defining cosmopolitanism as an identity, which generally only applies to affluent Westerners (Werbner, 1999) and typically lacks nuanced perspectives on race, gender, and class (Cook, 2012), interrogating narratives, conversations, and activism offers a more inclusive form of cosmopolitanism and a more useful analytical tool.

Through my engagement with literature to theoretically situate my dissertation, I have found that there is an abundance of abstract engagement with cosmopolitanism with relatively little empirical backing. Furthermore, much of the theoretical literature links cosmopolitanism with identity without questioning who is left out of this framework. The heuristic complements to literature related to cosmopolitanism have focused on non-Western diaspora living in Western countries (Cook, 2012; Christensen, 2011; Werbner, 1999) or nation-based studies of cosmopolitanism in the West (Mau et al., 2008; Gustafson, 2009), which seems counterintuitive in approaching a transnational, transcultural aesthetic. Moreover, Cook (2012) notes, in her article published a few years ago, there continues to be a paucity of qualitative research on cosmopolitan attitudes,

although there have been a few quantitative studies of populations in the West. This dissertation will attempt to address some of these gaps in the literature.

This thesis also aims to contribute to literature on the social media use of Muslims because studies of the online engagements of Muslims have often been narrowly focused on Islamic-oriented sites or websites dedicated to specific groups of Muslims based on nationality or geographical subgroupings. Etling et al. (2009) published a comprehensive study of the “Arab Blogospheres,” blogospheres of the Middle East and North Africa, but it focused on linguistic, political, religious, and geographical boundaries. This study said little about how social media users in the “Arab Blogosphere” interact with non-Arabs. Other studies, most notably those attributed to Gary Bunt (2004), have attempted to describe “cyber Islamic environments” through analyzing the websites of influential Islamic scholars and Arab resistance groups, such as Hezbollah and Hamas; however, while these websites might be prominent, they might also exclude Muslims who do not consume religious materials through these types of websites, those who do not use the internet to discuss religion, and those who do not support these resistance groups.

Websites related to Islamic knowledge that attempt to position Muslim lifestyles and religious authority in the modern era typically cater to Muslims in the West (Sisler, 2007). I did not focus on these websites because I wanted to preserve the inherent variance of Muslimness being that it is an affiliation that is embraced by nearly a quarter of the world’s population. By analyzing the topics of interest to and collective actions of Muslim women through transnational cyberspaces, scholars can avoid Islamic-oriented websites that tend toward conformity, or “homophily,” as network theorists call it, and

the overrepresentation of Muslim men in these online spaces.⁴ Furthermore, one is most likely to encounter cosmopolitan praxis in transnational cyberspaces rather than Muslim-oriented website because these spaces draw people from different cultural and religious backgrounds, not always into civil conversations (Jansson, 2013; Blaagaard, 2010), but engagements with “others” nonetheless. This thesis focuses on a particular form of cosmopolitan praxis: the vernacular variety. Vernacular cosmopolitan praxes take various forms, which will be outlined in the subsequent chapters, but a few of their commonalities include commitment to tolerance of divergent beliefs and dedication to humanity at the local and global level.

Research Questions

To gain insight into whether or not cosmopolitanism can appropriately frame the social media use of Muslim women, my research was initially guided by the following research questions: How do Muslim women frame issues related to women’s rights? Do their framings of women’s rights address local and/or global concerns and/or a continuum of local and global issues? Through my engagement with literature on cosmopolitanism, which led to the conceptualization of the meta-theory “vernacular cosmopolitan praxis” in transnational cyberspace, I added some additional questions, including the following: In what ways do Muslim women use social media to amplify and multiply their voices? To what extent are offline constraints related to interacting with others and promoting solidarity mirrored online? How do social media and networks facilitate and/or frustrate the attempts of Muslim women to engage with “others” online? To what extent do social

⁴ I mention the overrepresentation of Muslim men for two reasons: first, some Muslims do not believe that it is appropriate for men and women to interact online so some women may not participate on some of these sites to uphold online gender segregation; and, second, the beliefs of Muslim women sometimes lay in stark contrast to how issues are framed by religious authorities and Muslim men (see Chapter 4).

media counter or reinforce stereotyping and othering? To what extent do the perspectives of Muslim women in transnational cyberspaces counter dominant religious, political, and media discourses related to women's rights? To what extent do Muslim women express tolerance for divergent interpretations of Islamic beliefs and practices? What are some of the impediments to the collectivization of Muslim women? To what extent does the "digital ummah network"⁵ mediate issues related to the rights of Muslim women and women in general? How do women frame their (multiple) allegiances in social media? I also included the following research questions related to methodological concerns: how could vernacular cosmopolitan praxis be operationalized (in other words, what types of praxis can be identified as cosmopolitan)? Are the narratives and conversations of Muslim women qualitatively different in transnational online spaces that are not oriented specifically to Muslims or Muslim women?

Research Contributions

This dissertation attempts to contribute to literature related to cosmopolitanism in the following ways: by locating cosmopolitanism beyond the West; through focusing on praxis rather identity, which is also crucial to the first goal of determining if non-Western populations are exhibiting cosmopolitan behaviors in their online interactions with others; supplementing the paucity of studies related to cosmopolitanism among women in particular; by contributing to the slight representation of empirical studies on cosmopolitanism in general and qualitative studies in particular; and through analyzing

⁵ As I will discuss in Chapter 5, the "digital ummah network" is a network comprised of various nodes and bridges that link Muslims around the world in relation to certain topics of interest when the mediated issue reaches a sufficient density of these nodes and bridges, or a "critical mass." Whether or not a topic is mediated within bridges and nodes—in other words, reaches a critical mass—has to do with several factors, such as mediation, which I will discuss in Chapter 3.

the extent to which cyberspaces and digital networks facilitate and/or impede cosmopolitanism. My dissertation research also attempts to address the lack of studies of online populations, in this case Muslim populations, which examine heterogeneous networks and cross-cultural dialogues. This gap in the literature is perhaps related to how academics study populations of Muslims, centering on specific populations, typologies (liberal or traditional), or authoritative website but rarely how they interact with other/ed Muslims and non-Muslims. My research also disrupts the East/West binary by focusing on topics and collective actions related to Muslim women rather than focusing on identities or geographical locations. There is also very little literature that examines transnational networks of Muslim women without first reorienting the studies to particular countries, regions, or typologies or to specific transnational organizations, like Muslim Women Living Under Islamic Law. Following from disruptions of the East/West binary, this research contributes to literature that counters stereotypes of Muslim women, particularly the Arab Muslimwoman, by demonstrating how Muslim women are speaking out about injustices and highlighting parallels between the lived experiences of these women regardless of context.

Limitations of Research

This section will highlight some of the limitations of this research because in any study I believe that it is important to consider who is left out and what is emphasized through the methodology. Starting with who is left out, many of the social media users in the data likely emanate from the middle or middle upper class so people from other socioeconomic backgrounds are likely underrepresented because they may lack financial resources or sufficient leisure time to engage in online discussions. Furthermore, since

the data I collected was principally in English, even those who have sufficient resources and time to participate in online discussions may lack the requisite English skills to interact in the “digital ummah network” in which English is the *lingua franca*. Although many Muslim interlocutors among the largest Muslim populations in South and Southeast Asia may have the sufficient resources and English skills to participate in the digital ummah network, I have focused on topics and collective actions related to Muslim women in the West and the Arab world for several reasons: I have studied the Arab world for over a decade so I am more familiar with the history and politics of this region; Western stereotypes of Muslims often focus on Arab Muslims and, although Arabs are not always considered people of color, the religious identity of Arab Muslims has become politicized and racialized through hegemonic geo-political interests in the region; and simply as a means of qualifying the immense amount of data available in social media networks.

Structure of Dissertation

Before moving to the outline of the chapters, I should make a brief note of the structure of the chapters to follow. After the two chapters related to methodology, Chapter 1, which provides a literature review of cosmopolitanism and how I situate this study in the literature, and Chapter 2, which describes connective content analysis and the data collection for the topics and collective actions included in this research, Chapter 3 through 5, begin with brief discussions of how social media and network dynamics impact the social media use of Muslim women and then the chapters broach data from multiple datasets before offering theoretical discussions grounded in related literature. Chapter 6 offers three separate but interrelated case studies of collective actions related to

and/or initiated by Muslim women and their relative success based on the network underpinnings and the framing and mediation of the issues. On a final note, the hyperlinks footnoted throughout the dissertation are links from the datasets, while the scholarly sources are denoted through in-text citations.

Mapping the Chapters

Chapter 1 presents a literature review on cosmopolitanism. Since cosmopolitanism has become entangled with colonialism, elitism, and Eurocentricism (Werbner, 2006), I suggest recovering its ancient meaning—dedication to humanity—through distancing cosmopolitanism from the entrenchments of Christianity, empire building, Western values, and colonialism, which developed through the Enlightenment philosophers’ revival of the term. Some theorists have proposed “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (Werbner, 2006) or “rooted cosmopolitanism” (Appiah, 1998) as terms that reference dedication both to one’s local community and to the global cosmos, which are consistent with how the word was originally imagined in ancient times. These are the theoretical positions that inform this thesis. Since I am also interested in moving beyond theory and contributing to empirical literature on cosmopolitanism, I will attempt to highlight “vernacular cosmopolitan praxis” that I operationalize as the following: dialogue and network linkages that encourage interaction between dissimilar people (even among Muslims with dissimilar beliefs); dialogue that encourages inclusivity and civility; and the articulation of basic levels of comportment online and off, iteratively developed through discussions.

Chapter 2, “Getting Lost in Networks,” describes the methodology involved in this research, using what I have come to classify as a “connective content analysis.”

Starting with one topic (artificial hymen) and a node of a transnational network (American hijabi fashion blogging) that I discovered through following larger transnational and national groups of female Muslim bloggers, I discovered so many interesting topics and collective actions that I got lost in the overlapping networks that shared content, topics, qualitative themes, and social media users in common. These commonalities contributed to my inclination to put the datasets into conversation, which is why I conceptualize the methodology as connective. This chapter will provide a timeline of each dataset, both of the data collection and of the major online media events associated with the datasets, as well as a description of the iterative process through which the data was collected for each of the connective components of the methodology, highlighting the overlaps between the disparate but interconnected datasets.

Chapter 3, “Conversations in Cyberspace,” discusses the digital self-expression of Muslim women and how it could expand the “connective” or “networked” memory (Hoskins, 2011).⁶ Several Muslim women have used social media platforms to highlight cases of women who have been killed or have taken their own lives—“martyred women”—to impress upon the expanses of cyberspaces the need for continuing serious conversations about women’s rights, locally and transnationally. Their voices move beyond the perspectives of the Muslim women who have become spokespeople for the “safe,” pro-Western form of Islam promoted in Western media, the “native informant spokespeople,” following Chow (1993; also see Khan, 2005). I argue that Muslim women

⁶ The connective memory is similar to the nationally based collective memories, which is situated in the media artifacts of nation-states, but connective memories are comprised of digital archives. In Chapter 3, I discuss the dominant transnational connective memory, which includes the authority of search engine results based on the popular preferences, and “localized” or “alternative” connective memories that are based on the preferences of subgroupings within transnational networks.

demonstrate a cosmopolitan aesthetic through expanding the connective memory to balance the co-opted version of Islam advanced by the “safe” Muslims but their digital self-expressions are not equally mediated into the “transnational dominant connective memory.”⁷

Chapter 4, “Women’s Agency and Muslim Marriage,” highlights the variation among those who consider themselves Muslims by analyzing how different social actors frame the issue of the high proportions of unmarried women in various Muslim-majority nations and in Muslim communities in the West. In contrast to dominant discourses related to the issue, some Muslim women see spinsterhood as an empowered choice, particularly in the contexts of the lack of suitable prospective grooms. I point out issues in various datasets that may contribute to women deciding to remain single, including the following: the inability of women to “prove” their virginity, gender-based norms of segregation that constrain the normalization of relations between men and women, gendered double standards, and the high incidences of sexual violence in some Muslim communities that precludes the possibility of women wanting to develop relationships with men. The concluding section renders the dialectic between marriage and the agency of Muslim women as cosmopolitan aesthetics related to women demanding a basic standard of comportment from men before they agree to marry, which I characterize as “subtle resistance.”

⁷ The dominant transnational connective memory is related to the most linked to search engine results for Google keyword searches, for example. It also denotes the differences between localized networks, for example, using Google France, and transnational networks, for example, using Google without geographical qualifiers. The dominant network tends to be heavily influenced by Western, especially American, results and links preferences.

Chapter 5 frames typologies of Muslims, such as “liberal” and “traditional.” I analyze the hijabi fashion and Muslim lesbian networks to understand how Muslims situate their beliefs and practices as well as how different practices create ruptures within the larger “ummah,” or the tropes associated with an existing transnational Muslim community (singular). Many hijabis opine that veiling is obligatory and they feel ostracized from Muslim women who do not wear the hijab but, instead of treating this disagreement as a matter of divergent hermeneutics, they tend to believe that unveiled women are not practicing Islam correctly. In the case of queer Muslims, both some “liberal” and “traditional” Muslims dismiss the efforts of queer Muslims to use *ijtihad* to render themselves as both queer and Muslim. Both these cases demonstrate the dialectic between presenting Islam as a unified front through conformity with the beliefs of larger (“traditional”) ummah and the ability of Muslims to practice their own interpretations of the faith through personal, critical reflections on the Qur’an (*ijtihad*).

Chapter 6 highlights a few case studies of activism initiated by or related to Muslim women, which have met varying degrees of success locally and transnationally. The hijab discrimination case study mainly examines the reactions of mainstream non-Muslim Americans and those of the hijabi fashion network to two discriminatory work-related incidents involving hijabis, Boudlal v. Disney and Khan v. A&F, which illustrate rifts within the American hijabi community based on socioeconomics. The case study of Pink Hijab Day (PHD), which began as a movement to spread awareness about why women wear the hijab and about breast cancer, reveals that the initiative took root in several Muslim-minority countries but did not catch on in Muslim-majority countries because of pervasive social taboos related to cancer and due to the proactive measures of

many governments in the Arab world to promote breast cancer awareness. I also discuss how the weak hub of the PHD network failed to successfully mediate the campaign into other countries. The SlutWalk Morocco case study demonstrates apprehension of women's rights movements among some Moroccan commenters, especially campaigns that are affiliated with Western feminism. Despite this opposition, SlutWalk Morocco refuses to situate itself as either a secularist or an Islamic movement, which contributed to its simultaneously local and transnational appeal.

The Conclusion recapitulates the vernacular cosmopolitan praxis that I highlighted in the chapters of this thesis. It summarizes the theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions of this dissertation and offers some prescriptions for future research, including the acknowledgement that Western cosmopolitanism, rather than cosmopolitanism, is the starting point of most studies that interrogate the concept. Transnational interactions and dedication to humanity among non-Westerners are cast as qualified versions of cosmopolitanism due to their circumvention of the West. Until the invisible Western components of cosmopolitanism and universalism are explicitly articulated in associated literature, there is little hope of developing more inclusive imaginings of these concepts.

Chapter 1

Cosmopolitan Muslim Women in Cyberspace

“In regards to SOME men Arab bloggers, they are so misguided, they think because they are on the internet they have no boundaries or respect for other people (male or female) My rule is, if I am sitting down having a conversation with someone face to face lets say about religion, I am not going to call them stupid and yell in their face and call them names or whatever, so why would I do it online? Or the sense of entitlement some people have (male or female) , they say, you publish that means you want our input, well yes input is welcome if you don’t forget to bring your manners with you” (Asoom).

“I agree, but still think that since bloggers are generally more open-minded, I feel like I could discuss subjects that I wouldn’t with strangers in reality. That being said, I wouldn’t divulge details of my personal life, not only because I feel I could be judged, but also because I feel that people would stop taking what you say on other matters seriously. Whether we admit it or not, we all have this preconception of who the person behind the keyboard is. I contribute in another not so serious blog, but even there I didn’t feel I could openly discuss personal dilemmas that anonymously I probably would” (Farah).

“that is the misconception that bloggers are open minded. Maybe the bloggers you read or most of those who read you are but don’t forget your blog is open to millions of people that could be VERY close minded. Or they portray themselves to be open minded, but trust me Farah that the majority is not. You would be surprised. I know a lot of bloggers (not personally) who regret exposing their identity, male and female. Unfortunately sometimes anon bloggers are not taken seriously. It’s a catch 22, you have to expose your identity to be taken seriously but you can’t say everything if you do” (7aki Fadi).

“freedom = ability to wear a miniskirt/ability...? and talk about drunken parties? if that is freedom, i don’t want it. is that really how we want our younger generations to understand what freedom means? I agree completely that minorities (women, gay, brown folk) get marginalized in all aspects of life: on blogs, in the media, in the workplace. but the enemy here is liberalism. western liberalism that flattens all differences, makes everyone ‘equal,’ but only equal if you are a white, european, christian, male. in modern city life, society is based on individualism. generally in rural areas it is a more collective system. here in the middle east, the collective triumphs over the individual. collective and individual systems have pros and cons; neither is perfect” (ramsey).⁸

The quotes above are the opinions of some Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian women in regard to the freedoms associated with social media use. The posting, initiated by “7aki Fadi,” discussed how women in the Middle East have to be careful about what they write on their blogs because they are judged by every word that they write and publically shamed if a reader believes that they have breached what is considered appropriate for women to discuss. Some say social media offer more freedom but others say that online

⁸ <http://7akifadi.com/2009/08/06/the-difference-between-men-and-women-in-the-middle-eastern-arab-blogsphere/>

environments simply reflect the oppression, policing, and double standards of their societies offline. Some of the women advance the importance of politeness in online spaces, while others point out that trolling is a mechanism of reinforcing offline norms. Some imply that social media allow them to discuss topics that they would not introduce into offline spaces, while others reflect on the types of freedoms that should be enjoyed in anonymous online environments. I highlight this conversation here to initiate a discussion of the extent to which cosmopolitanism can be found in online spaces and, if it can be discovered, is it prevalent only among users from certain geographical locations? Do social media allow spaces for people to demonstrate tolerance, respect difference, and come to agreements on certain basic standards of social behavior online and offline? Are the opportunities qualitatively different from opportunities they might have to offline?

This chapter will position my dissertation research theoretically in contemporary and historical literature on cosmopolitanism. As the world has become intensely interconnected through information and capital, globalization has encouraged cultural uniformity based on the American and European models. This does not signify that alternative modern cultural forms are irrelevant, but the overwhelming influence of the hegemonic culture insists that alternative social, political, and economic configurations continuously justify their lack of compliance with hegemonic standards. Since Islam has come to replace Communism as the most virile threat to secularity, liberalism, democracy, and capitalism (Cole, 2011), according to those who promulgate the Washington Consensus, Muslims are often only discussed in Western media in association with fanaticism, human rights violations, corruption, and terrorism. Islamophobia is employed

as a political tool to reinforce a binary of possibilities: with or against the Washington Consensus.

Western norms are constructed as natural and superior particularly when juxtaposed to Eastern social and political ontologies. This dynamic presents an important paradox in conceptualizing cosmopolitanism. If only those societies that agree with the hegemonic political, economic, and social culture are labeled as cosmopolitan, it becomes a vacuous term and suggests the impossibility of promoting a shared sense of humanity and establishing agreements on basic global standards. Being that Western mainstream media and culture typically only reference Muslims to demonstrate the enduring incompatibility of Western and Eastern ideologies, social media networks provide platforms for digital self-expression where Muslims can share their own opinions and offer countersentences regarding how Westerners perceive them and their beliefs. This is particularly important for Muslim woman because they are often underrepresented in positions of power and rendered through stereotype in media.

Being that over 20% of the world population is Muslim and Islam is practiced in divergent forms in numerous nations around the world, there is a great potential to find cosmopolitan discussions among Muslim social media users in cyberspaces that are principally inhabited by Muslims and in those that are not. Cosmopolitanism has been framed in many ways but it is generally connected to either identity or tolerant attitudes. In scholarly literature related to cosmopolitan identity, it has typically been theorized as an elitist, Western positionality and, since Muslims are often framed as the antithesis of this persona, the typical conclusion is that Muslims cannot be considered cosmopolitans. This is a very limited view of cosmopolitanism, which reduces a potentially important

principle to localities and bank accounts. I argue that cosmopolitanism, typically an abstract ideal, could more effectively be conveyed through praxis that, for example, encourages universal standards of rights and conduct that are developed through local-global iterations (Benhabib, 2004) and/or behaviors that promote intercultural dialogue and tolerance (Chen, 2012; Shuter, 2012), although intercultural could be extended beyond “cultural” to include other political, economic, and/or religious practices and beliefs.

Cosmopolitanism, often associated with Western social ontologies, could be advanced in a post-imperialist sense through examining the praxis of cultural others, in this case, Muslim women in the West and the Arab world, through their social media interactions. When the concept was originally developed, it advanced dedication to both the local community and the cosmos but the ideal was co-opted by political leaders in the early Christian era to substantiate empire building. The cooptation persisted when cosmopolitanism became *en vogue* during the Enlightenment era and political and religious leaders used it to underpin the superiority of Western values to validate their colonialist objectives toward the rest of the world. Contemporary literature continues to implicitly center cosmopolitanism in the West due to the lack of studies focusing on cosmopolitan propensities among non-Western populations. Postcolonial theorists, such as Bhabha (1994), have advanced the term vernacular cosmopolitanism to reintroduce the local component of the concept as it was originally imagined, which is the theoretical framework that informs this thesis. To decenter cosmopolitanism from a minute focus on the West, I have analyzed non-Westerners and Westerners in transnational online spaces. I will also discuss how these spaces can both facilitate and constrain cosmopolitan praxis.

The next section as well as the last will outline literature that has discussed cosmopolitanism in conjunction with Muslim populations. The next section will highlight the theoretical contribution of cooke (2007) to discussions of Muslim women and cosmopolitanism and a few critiques of her theoretical framework, Muslimwoman.

Muslim Woman and Muslimwoman

Before moving forward, I must acknowledge the efforts of miriam cooke (2007) to illuminate discussions of both Muslim women and cosmopolitanism through her “Muslimwoman” framework. Since I use the term “Muslim women” extensively throughout this dissertation, her work is an important starting point. cooke (2007) says,

The Muslimwoman identification may be disabling or empowering. Some women reject this reduction to stereotype while others embrace it. Its uniformity across gulfs of difference intensifies an awareness of a global community in which they participate, a cosmopolitan consciousness that connects strangers who recognize an unprecedented commonality in terms of religion and gender...that enables a negotiation of the outsider/insider boundary...[in contrast] some Muslim women are strategically deploying the Muslimwoman identification (p. 141).

For cooke (2007), “Muslimwoman” can be simultaneously empowering, due to its potential to unite women under the same label, and disempowering, due to the associated stereotypes. She claims that in some cases social media have allowed for the development of the “cosmopolitan Muslimwoman” religious figure and, in other cases, they have enable the Muslimwoman to challenge stereotypes in non-religious ways. cooke (2007) posits that the more diversity that manifests among Muslim women, the more some Muslims attempt to “cage” this plurality, of which the veil is an important indicator whether it is banned or mandated. As I will discuss in the chapters that follow, the veil is worn in some contexts to prevent sexual harassment, while it is employed in others to show pride and solidarity; it is also used as a symbol of activism and resistance, including one used gain entry to the male public sphere. Thus the reasons that Muslim women

articulate for veiling may significantly differ from the objectives of other Muslims whom encourage the practice.

cooke (2007) identifies the different angles from which Muslim women have harnessed their voices to speak out both in favor and against the Muslimwoman, including the following: “Sharia activism,” (2007, p. 146), social media use, legal reform, art/literature, “insider stories” (2007, p. 145) (what I call “native informant spokespeople” in Chapter 3), “Hejab Fashion,” and so forth. The resulting diversity is cosmopolitan ontologies of “multiple belongings”:

They negotiate borders as places to erase but also to mark and inhabit. This ambivalent location intensifies awareness of multiple belongings and of cultural hybridity, while making their voices possible...Muslimwoman cosmopolitanism works across borders to weave a hybrid cultural system that disturbs the hegemony and desired homogeneity in others of both neo-Orientalists and religious extremists... When the attempt to interpellate the Muslimwoman fails, when she refuses to be constituted as a subject by those who hail her, she undermines their control and the reproduction of their ideology (cooke, 2007, p. 152-153).

cooke (2007) is suggesting that neither the “religious” nor the “secular” Muslimwoman are easily compartmentalized and their failure to conform to either extreme, preferring instead to inhabit a hybrid state of “multiple belongings,” is an act of resistance. Like cooke (2007), my work attempts to emphasize the plurality of Muslim women, so I stress the plural “Muslim women,” but I am unable to distance myself from this categorization because the term is often self-ascribed and it is also employed with qualifiers as a discursive device within Muslim communities to assess authenticity and in Western rhetoric to mark the incompatibility of Muslim women with dominant Western cultures. Likewise, “hijabi” and “unveiled” and “Moroccan” and “Arab” and “American revert” and “British South Asian” are all employed to render diversity in beliefs and practices within Muslim communities as well as to cast Muslim women as incongruous with Western norms and values.

Useful critiques of this article also underpin some of what I attempt to highlight in the subsequent chapters. As Zine (2008) aptly remarks,

[cooke's] cosmopolitanism remains an elitist project. It needs to be qualified that only *some* privileged women benefit from this kind of cosmopolitanism or inhabit it as a form of identity. The millions of Muslim women in the global south who live as refugees or internally displaced peoples, without electricity and access to basic needs including health care and education, cannot partake of this cosmopolitanism utopia (p. 115, her emphasis).

I would add that this is not simply an interplay between the North and South, as Zine (2008) suggests, although it is through these fault lines that one may encounter the starkest differences between cooke's (2007) digitally savvy, cosmopolitan Muslimwoman and the displaced Muslim woman who lacks basic human rights to healthcare and education, let alone access to the internet. However, these exclusionary divides also exist within Muslim communities within the same societies in both the North and the South. The ideological disconnections between more affluent Moroccan social media users, for example, and the larger population has been noted elsewhere (Robinson and Parmentier, forthcoming) and the case study on hijab discrimination in Chapter 6 will demonstrate that manifestations of socioeconomic exclusions through the digital divide not only exist between societies but also within them.

Furthermore, while cooke (2007) reveals the empowerment of Muslimwoman through either her "Sharia activism," which some scholars might classify as "Islamic feminism," *or* through what some might call more "secular" ventures, including legal reform and literary contributions, others suggest that this disjuncture continues to impede solidarity among Muslim women plural. As Zine (2008) points out, "we remain internally divided along lines of secular or religious orientation, which also inhibits our ability to join forces to combat common sources and sites of oppression irrespective of our

ideological positions” (p. 115). I agree with Zine that this is a possibility in some cases. SlutWalk Morocco in Chapter 6, for example, which may be compartmentalized as secularist activism, faced a fair amount of derision for not explicitly articulating its Islamic credentials. Though it would be incorrect to assume that “Sharia activism” is a unitary commitment as a discussion of polygyny in Chapter 4 demonstrates. Some interlocutors used the Qur’an to argue both in favor and against the practice of polygyny and others used cyberspaces not to argue against it but to advance basic standards related to the practice.

Returning to the secular/religious binary, some hijabi fashion bloggers (Chapter 5), a network that cooke (2007) classifies as an expression of the cosmopolitan Muslimwoman, tend to accept or have internalized the hierarchy of piety based on modesty, which necessarily casts unveiled women at the nadir of Muslimwomanness, leading to their exclusion among the ranks of “good” Muslim women (Badran, 2008, p. 104; Zine, 2008, p. 112). In other words, the veiled, religious Muslimwoman is “good” and the unveil, secular Muslimwoman is “bad.” Nevertheless, the veil in the United States may be more related to solidarity than to the interplay between the secular and the religious Muslimwoman, which may render the hijabi fashion blogger more appropriately as a “moderate Muslim woman” that Badran (2008) discusses (p. 105). Badran claims that cooke’s (2007) nomenclature is not appropriately applied in some of the latter’s examples and that “moderate Muslim woman” might fit better than cooke’s (2007) cosmopolitan Muslimwoman in some instances. Says Badran (2008),

The moderate Muslim is ideally quiescent and conformist. The Muslimwoman slides nicely into the moderate Muslim woman. The moderate Muslim woman does not function as the antithesis of the female extremist (still rare) but as the antithesis of the gender-radical sharia activist women or Islamic feminists (not to be confused with conservative sharia-ist women) (p. 105).

In Badran's (2008) reply, however, she does not address cooke's (2007) premise that Muslimwoman can be used to simultaneously claim and object to the ascription. Some of the hijabi fashion bloggers, for example, might be considered "moderate," while others might be perceived as "Sharia activists" for and against veiling so some of these Muslim women do not necessarily fit into the category of Badran's (2008) "moderate." Yet Badran's emphasis on the "quiescent and conformist" nature of moderateness perhaps undermines the empowering potential of the Muslimwoman project for those who do fall into the moderate category.

The separate categories that cooke (2007) employs to ontologically render the Muslimwoman also require acknowledgement of epistemological issues related to women's rights. What is often called "secularist" in discussions of women right's is the belief that Muslim women need to reclaim their rights through their efforts toward legal reform and greater political representation. Nevertheless, these secular activities do not contradict "religious" epistemologies of women's rights, grounded in the liberatory Weltanschauung of the Qur'an, to use Amina Wadud's (1999) term (p. 3); in fact, they complement each other but the complaints of activists may be directed at different, though overlapping, entities and institutions. Since politics are often reinforced by religion and they work together to determine the status of women in any given society, even in those that ostensibly operate under the virtues of secularism (Norris & Inglehart, 2011), one might say that "secular" and "religious" efforts are addressing both, but the targets and framings of the activism differ. I prefer to conceptualize these forms of activism as addressing distinct but overlapping institutions rather than through applying

binary labels but, since this binary was a common theme in the datasets, which I will discuss it in more detail in Chapters 4 and 6, it warrants a bit more discussion here.

Social media users could make important contributions to both “secular” and “religious” efforts, as cooke (2007) rightly points out. Some Muslim women believe that the state should take the lead in ensuring their rights, while others posit that *Shari’ah*, which governs personal and family law in some Muslim-majority countries, would have to be addressed first so they focus their efforts on changing the mindsets of communities and religious authorities through advancing liberatory hermeneutics of the Qur’an. Social media offer spaces where people may address grievances regarding what they believe to be misinterpretations of the Qur’an. Moreover, social media users have been playing an important role in addressing the Islamic religious sphere for the last few decades as the internet has the capacity to contribute to the decentralization of already decentralized religious authority based on popular support (Turner, 2007), which I will discuss more in Chapter 5. The “secular” activists could find supporters through social media in communities in which the term secularism is still considered a dirty word and, if the networks that carry their messages grow sufficiently large, their activism has the potential to influence politics and social norms. Thus social media are employed toward both secular and religious forms of activism and both address larger Muslim communities. Within Muslim communities, social norms constrain and promote women’s right so Muslim women who address secular targets and those who promote religious reform have been addressing Muslim communities through social media in an effort to encourage activism against unjust laws, undermine stereotypes of women, and promote reexaminations of widely held religious interpretations that underpin the inferiority and

policing of women, which contribute to gender biased laws. My point is that there is evident complementarity in these activist persuasions and how social media could facilitate them.

I now turn to another critique related to the Muslimwoman: the cosmopolitan Muslimwoman identity. Some scholars have critiqued cooke's (2007) theoretical framework for grounding it in cosmopolitanism. Zine (2008), for instance, claims,

We must address how bland constructions of liberal cosmopolitanism or a "feel-good" cosmopolitan discourse can obscure the politics of inequality and structures of power and subordination wrought through the related processes of globalization, in the way that "multiculturalism" has created the same illusory smoke screen hiding the hierarchies of racial power and privilege (p. 116).

While cooke's (2007) framing of cosmopolitanism is more complex than Zine's (2008) characterization of it, Zine (2008) offers an important caveat to consider. In this dissertation, I am not attempting to advance whom a cosmopolitan Muslimwoman or Muslim woman is, but what she does, especially through her uses of social media; in other words, I am interested in her praxis. Framing cosmopolitanism through identities will often result in the type of critique that Zine (2008) puts forth because the concept has a complicated legacy that has been connected to Western superiority and colonialist objectives. Toward examining cosmopolitanism as praxis rather than identity, some Muslim women engage in dialogue that encourages tolerance and acceptance of divergent opinions, which is particularly difficult in relation to deeply held religious beliefs. Another form of cosmopolitan praxis that I take up in the subsequent chapters is non-alienating activism that forms bridges between distinct groups, such as between supposedly distinct secular and religious activists and/or between non-Western and

Western groups. This is the form of cosmopolitanism—actions rather than people—that is central to this thesis.

This section has discussed cooke's (2007) theoretical framework of Muslimwoman and some critiques of it, including distinctive affinities toward religiosity and secularity and boundaries of exclusion among Muslims based on socioeconomic factors. I will argue that some of the issues highlighted in the critiques can be avoided by analyzing the interactions of Muslim women online rather than focusing on their identities. In subsequent chapters, I will posit that neither secular nor religious online activism necessarily promotes more tolerance or inclusivity among social media users but certain forms of collective action could be advanced as less alienating. The next section will offer a broad historical overview of cosmopolitanism, which is a lofty ideal that was introduced before both Christianity and Islam but, through philosophical engagements with the concept, particularly during the Enlightenment period, it came to be tied to Western civilization and empire building.

Historical and Contemporary Overviews of Cosmopolitanism

The conceptualization of cosmopolitanism can be traced to ancient Greek philosophers who believed that all people are connected through their shared humanity regardless of their divergent political and religious beliefs and cultural affiliations. Cynic Diogenes was the first to use the term in the 4th century BCE in his assertion that he was a “citizen of the cosmos.” His application of the term suggested nonconformity to the provincial norm that maintained that one's first responsibility was to the local polity because Cynic Diogenes argued that he did not owe any special service to the advancement of the Sinopeans (Kleingeld, 2006). A century later, the Stoics also

expressed affinity toward cosmopolitanism but their characterization of it included both dedications to the “cosmos” and to the local polity, which included moving away from one’s home to serve the world-citizenry (Kleingeld, 2006). In Rome, Stoic influences on the ideal of cosmopolitanism linked responsibility to the world with obligations to the homeland. During early Christianity, Roman cosmopolitanism became associated with the development of humanity through empire and a common religion, notably through Augustine who used affiliation with Christianity to underpin his perceptions of superior and inferior forms of humanity (Kleingeld, 2006); hence, the notion of “barbarian” and “civilized” came about. Although not all benefitted equally from this imperial form of cosmopolitanism, the tropes related to it continued to suggest obligations to the whole of humanity but, during the Roman period, this obligation took on the concrete form of engaging humanity through spreading the “universal” religion.

Despite its impressive legacy, contemporary scholars tend to historicize the foundations of cosmopolitanism in the Enlightenment period beginning with Immanuel Kant. Kant is often cited as one of the philosophers who integrated the concept into the era along with others, including Adam Smith, Alexis de Toqueville, Goethe, Herder, Humboldt, Nietzsche, Marx, and Simmel (Beck & Szajder, 2006; Beck, 2004). Dallmayr (2012) adds Jean Paul, Lessing, and Schiller to the list. In the early 18th century, Kant related cosmopolitanism to neighborly kindness among dissimilar people, or a “universal cosmopolitan condition”: for “a peaceful...and universal community of all people on earth who can come into active relations with one another...[and share] the right of common possession of the surface of the earth...they must ultimately tolerate one another as neighbors” (Kant, 2006 as cited in Popke, 2007, p. 509). Kant and Marx, and to a

certain extent Simmel and Smith, argued that the shift from closed societies to market expansion and the dissemination republican principles, the “cosmopolitan vision,” required the “dissolution of small territorial communities and the spread of universal social and economic interdependence” (Beck & Szajder, 2006, p. 9). Part of what this cosmopolitan vision entailed in Kantian imaginings was the configuration of supranational governing structures, not necessarily related to markets, to foster the “interrelation between states and people” (Dallmayr, 2012, p. 176), which Benhabib (2004) refers to as “cosmopolitan federalism” (p. 2).

It was also during the Enlightenment period that cosmopolitanism became disassociated with the actions of socio-political systems, as was typical of earlier periods, and came to be considered as an individual (European) attribute. In other words, cosmopolitanism became detangled from the empire building of leaders and polities, as it was during the imperial conquests of the Christian empire, and was recast as identity or characteristics of certain people. This cosmopolitan persona was not only European but also an affluent European. As Beck (2011) says, “Cosmopolitanism in Immanuel Kant’s philosophical sense means something active, a task, a conscious and voluntary choice, clearly the affair of an elite” (p. 1348). However, the elites were not the targets of anti-cosmopolitan scorn, which was a popular response to the promotion of nationalism in conjunction with the development of nation-states.

Being that the mixing of cultures was a requisite aspect of empire, nationalism played an important role in demarcating otherness during the colonial period (Kofman, 2005). In the 18th century, cosmopolitanism faced derision as the antithesis of nationalism but Kofman (2005), following Lasch (1995), suggests that anti-cosmopolitan rhetoric was

aimed more at migrants, whose loyalties were suspect, than at the cosmopolitan elite who were perceived to disregard their nationalistic affiliations. According to Kofman (2005), “Nationalists described not themselves but others, especially internal others, as cosmopolitans. Jews, in particular, represented rootless and unstable ubiquity; they were perceived as a corrupting element, foreign to the people and the nation” (p. 89). The tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism continued for centuries, culminating, as Fine and Cohen (2002) suggest, with the backlash of the extreme anti-cosmopolitanism of the nationalistic Nazis against the cosmopolitan Jews (Kofman, 2005, p. 89). Thus cosmopolitanism promoted othering through universalism modeled on Western civilization, highlighted in the racist, xenophobic remarks advanced by Western societies and Enlightenment philosophers, including Kant (Harvey 2000a).

However, the rebirth of cosmopolitanism in the Enlightenment era followed a similar trajectory to the Roman version of cosmopolitan excursions. van der Veer (2002), for instance, says,

[Cosmopolitanism] has a clear genealogy in the European Enlightenment and in its development into a liberal, progressive ideal in the nineteenth century it connects nationalism with imperialism...in nineteenth-century Europe it was always complemented by a Christian cosmopolitanism of both the Catholic and the Protestant kind. Missionary movements in nineteenth-century Britain, for example, created a public awareness of...an imperial duty towards the rest of the world. Liberal cosmopolitanism and evangelical cosmopolitanism developed side by side in the colonial era. Their commonality was well expressed in the phrase ‘the white man’s burden’ (p. 104).

As a concept that developed in Europe under racism and colonialism, and previously under Roman empire building, it is not difficult to understand why the underlying meaning of cosmopolitanism is suspect. Although the spread of Islam is often perceived as anti-cosmopolitan, a virile threat to Western civilization until the fall of the Ottoman Empire that has been reinvented in the age of global terrorism, the proponents of

Christianity were engaging in “cosmopolitan” excursions centuries before the Islamic faith was established. The point is that, while Islam is often connected to spreading religion through violence and, contemporarily, to anti-Western sentiments, Christian Europeans have a longer history of engaging in religious “cosmopolitan” conquests.

Although cosmopolitanism was often advanced through religious universalism, it was also used to describe elitist consumption of divergent cultures, while simultaneously depreciating them. Appiah (2010) uses the example of Sir Richard Francis Burton to illustrate the contradictory perspectives of European cosmopolitans during the colonial period. Burton was well travelled and an excellent linguist, which he used to translate non-Western text and to make the mysterious Orient visible to Europeans; he, for example, translated *Kama Sutra* and *Thousand and One Nights* that laid the foundation for the stereotype of the perverse sexuality of Oriental cultures. Says Appiah (2010), “He was the least Victorian of men, and the most. Certainly he had many of the standard racial prejudices of his society. Africans he ranked below Arabs and Indians, both of whom were below civilized Europeans” (p. 6-7). He goes on to say that, although Burton had some appreciation for non-Western literary and artistic forms, what Appiah characterizes as the second strand of cosmopolitanism, similar to banal cosmopolitanism that I will discuss below, there was little evidence to suggest that he embraced the “first strand of cosmopolitanism: the recognition of our responsibility for every human being” (p. 7). Burton’s consumption of other cultures was used as a tool to reinforce European superiority rather than to advance shared humanity through the appreciation of difference.

More recently, following from the European legacies of the “white man’s burden” and the affluent traveller, cosmopolitanism has been linked to disposable income

(Calhoun, 2008). Calhoun (2008) calls these “cosmopolitans” the “multinational cosmopolitan elite” (p. 443) who are able brush off “parochial” ethnic allegiances through their sense of belonging to this elite transnational group. This group is similar to what Sassen (1998) and Castells (1996) refer to as the “transnational elite.” Castells (1996) discusses the nuances of this group in finite detail, from their fitness activity of choice (jogging) to their likelihood of ordering udon and sashimi in restaurants to their preference of paint in their living rooms (also see Bell, 2007). Passages about this globetrotting, unrooted group suggests that there are more similarities between the transnational elites of Thai origin, for example, and those of North American origin than there are between the Thai elites and the poorer Thai people. However, it should not necessarily follow that the transnational elite are more impervious to ethnocentrism than their poorer compatriots, despite their ready consumption of ethnic-chic marketed throughout the world. Thus, this transnational group slightly detangles cosmopolitanism from the Western worldview, if we can actually characterize it as cosmopolitan, which, I would argue, places cosmopolitanism on shaking ground.

Polson (2011), on the other hand, distinguishes another group, the transnational middle class, who are more appropriately rendered as cosmopolitans than the elites mentioned above. Since national development, especially in free market economies, is strongly tied to the idea of the upward mobility of the middle class (Polson, 2011), middle class professionals who prefer to interact with groups of their counterparts from all over the world are more aptly situated as cosmopolitans because they have chosen their ties based on common attachments rather than patriotism or consumerism. In contrast, elite “cosmopolitans,” who are typically described as rootless, “have a home

underpinned by traditional gender relations of trailing wives and/or rely on the global redistribution of social reproduction...provided by migrant labour” (Kofman, 2005, p. 85; also see Beaverstock 2002). This group of transnational middle class is less receptive to social capital as Bourdieu (1985) conceptualizes it, which relates to “preserving and transmitting the cultural capital of the elite” (Onxy et al., 2011, p. 59), but instead has developed its own form of social capital based on its “international outlook in terms of...career, place of residence, and social networks...[and members have] accepted a period abroad as a step toward advancement back home” (Fechter, 2007 as cited in Polson, 2011, p. 147-148). This is the group from which many of the interlocutors in my datasets emanate; they are marked by their simultaneous inward and outward approaches and more likely than the transnational elites to question status quo and perceptions of social capital. In selecting its affiliation among others of the same stripes, the transnational middle class is disrupting several of the following commonly accepted factors related to the historical legacy of cosmopolitanism, which were articulated during the Enlightenment and colonialist periods: cosmopolitans lack rootedness and patriotism; they are an elite group that consume other cultures, while advancing the superiority of their own (or the superiority of the transnational elites); cosmopolitanism is only possible among Westerners because they are the only groups that are sufficiently tolerant to respect other cultures; cosmopolitans are Westerners who pride individualism but not cultural difference; and cosmopolitanism can be encouraged through conformity to Western values, including the dominant religion, because they are the most universal.

This section has framed various historical perspectives on cosmopolitanism, an affiliation that originally denoted simultaneous attachments for the local and universal

through a shared sense of humanity but, as time progressed, evolved into the imperialistic aims of uniting people under the dominant Western religion and civilization rather than promoting a shared sense of humanity despite divergent beliefs. These trends are also reflected in contemporary scholarly studies related to cosmopolitan subjectivities. In contemporary parlance, cosmopolitanism is linked to consumer culture but remains a privileged positionality of affluent, well-traveled Western elites and their counterparts throughout the world, but particularly to the “elite white man” (Cook, 2012, p. 6), which has been criticized in several works (see Matthew & Sidhu, 2005; Sklair, 2001; Turner, 2002; Venn, 2002). The next several subsections will discuss the myriad of ways that cosmopolitanism has been conceptualized in contemporary literature. I will principally focus on several works by Ulrich Beck (2004; 2011; Beck & Sznaider, 2006) because he has been cited in nearly every piece of literature related to cosmopolitanism in the last decade and a critique of his conceptualization advanced by Calhoun, which is representative of one of the most enduring theoretical debates related to cosmopolitanism: the strain between nationalism and cosmopolitanism and the feasibility of cosmopolitanism on a global scale. These subsections will also discuss elements of cosmopolitanism that are often absent in framings of the concept—the shared sense of humanity and simultaneously situating one’s dedication to both the local and the cosmos.

Toward a Definition of Cosmopolitanism

This subsection will describe various uses of the terms cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitans, which will indicate that there is little agreement among scholars either in relation to the systemic configurations that would complement cosmopolitanism or the type of person who could be considered cosmopolitan. Beck (2004), for example,

references a handful of different forms of cosmopolitanism and similar conceptualizations with different names, which clearly complicates matters for anyone who is interested in applying the terms to empirical phenomena. Roudometof (2005) also highlights various conceptual attachments to cosmopolitanism: “cosmopolitan nation,” “cosmopolitan democracy,” “cosmopolitan citizenship,” or “cosmopolitan society” (p. 116; also see Mau et al., 2008, p. 4). Likewise, in his book, *Anyone: The Subject of Cosmopolitan Anthropology*, Rapport (2012) lists the various labels that have been applied to studies related to cosmopolitanism, including the following, just to name a few: ““plural discrepant cosmopolitanisms” (Clifford 1998)...“pre-modern/modern cosmopolitans” (Stade 2006)...“upper-class cosmopolitan Cairene youth” (Peterson 2011)...“heretical cosmopolitan Muslim intellectuals” (Kersten 2011)...“working-class Pakistani cosmopolitan migrants” (Werbner 1999)” (p. 1). Rapport’s (2012) complaint regarding studies of cosmopolitanism is clear: cosmopolitans are anyone and everyone.

Some scholars attempt to advance conceptual clarity by qualifying the term cosmopolitanism. Roudometof (2005) offers an example by articulating the distinctions between “thin cosmopolitanism” and “thick [or rooted] cosmopolitanism” (p. 113; also Beck, 2011). Thick cosmopolitanism maintains, “all moral principles must be justified by showing that they give equal weight to the claims of everyone” (Miller, 1998 as cited in Held, 2005, p. 17). Thin cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, holds that “we may owe certain kinds of treatment to all other human beings regardless of any relationship in which we stand to them, while there are other kinds of treatment that we owe only to those to whom we are related in certain way” (Miller, 1998 as cited in Held, 2005, p. 17). Calhoun (2008), in contrast, discussed the various ways that cosmopolitanism has been

conceptualized with or without qualifiers, to demonstrate the diversity in usages of the term. First, he says, cosmopolitanism has been employed to illustrate the tendency of “focusing on the world as a whole rather than on a particular locality or group” (Calhoun, 2008, p. 428). Second, the term has been used to describe the relative diversity of a given city: for example, “New York [is] more cosmopolitan than Cleveland” (Calhoun, 2008, p. 428). Third, Calhoun states that cosmopolitanism is used to describe the interconnectedness of the world, which Beck (2004; 2011) conceptualizes as “cosmopolitanization.” Scholars who advance a unitary conceptualization are sometimes criticized for whom they leave out. For instance, Hannerz (1990) claims that cosmopolitanism is “an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences” (as cited in Roudometof, 2005, p. 114) but Hannerz has been critiqued because his version of cosmopolitanism is perceived as too elitist and exclusionary in nature (Cook, 2012, p. 6).

Conceptual disagreements are exacerbated in attempting to locate cosmopolitan subjectivities, especially among those who are not typically categorized as such. Several studies have attempted to dispute tacit implication that cosmopolitanism is either an elitist category or a Western one. Werbner (1999), for example, claims that even working class people could be classified as cosmopolitans. Cook (2012) enlightens this impasse by suggesting that people could be concurrently oriented toward the local and the global (p. 6; also see Lawrence, 2010 as cited in Hoestery, 2012, p. 41), fleshing out this form of subjectivity in her study of Canadian development workers from Pakistani expatriate communities. Christensen (2011) identifies a similar dynamic among Turkish diaspora living in Sweden. Says Christensen (2011), “their capacity to sustain both in-group

commonality and individual difference in their identities, and the nature and boundaries of their social networks and communicative patterns are clearly constitutive of cosmopolitan life-worlds” (p. 890). However, as I pointed out above, there continues to be a significant lack of studies of cosmopolitan subjectivities among non-Westerners living in non-Western countries, which reinforces the scholarly bias that non-Westerners who have not come into contact with Western lifestyles, do not have the requisite tolerance or attachments to “universal” (Western) values to merit the status of cosmopolitan.

Even when theorists agree on what the concept evokes, they differ on if or how cosmopolitanism could play out heuristically in the contemporary global society. According to Sen (2009), the Rawlsian approach to cosmopolitanism, which the latter theorized in the *Law of Peoples* (2001), would be to establish global institutions to ensure that the rights of people were respected. While this perspective is consistent with Kant’s imagining of the cosmopolitan project, others, including Sen (2009) himself, find the promotion of global institutions problematic. Some scholars believe that cosmopolitanism can only be accomplished on a national scale—“cosmopolitan nationalism” (Nussbaum, 1994; Nielsen, 1999). Others, like Smith (2001), claim that the nation is becoming obsolete (Mau et al., 2008, p. 2) so cosmopolitanism could still hold currency in the modern international post-structural system. Vertovec and Cohen (2002) tend to lean toward “cosmopolitan nationalism” but they include a diasporic form of consciousness in their engagement with the concept: “the capacity to engage with cultural multiplicity and presenting new ways of belonging, forms of identity and citizenship” (as cited in Kofman, 2005, p. 83). The theoretical positions discussed in this subsection highlight that the

tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, which were prevalent during the 18th century, still hold true today. Some theorists also suggest that, despite the potential importance of the concept in the current era that is extensively interconnected through politics, trade, shared risks, communications, and so forth, cosmopolitanism remains a utopia ideal.

This subsection has briefly discussed the conceptual disjunctures underpinning debates about cosmopolitanism that tend to stall any progression beyond this phase in relation to operationalizing the concept. The next two subsections frame the debate related to the realistic scope in which cosmopolitanism could be advanced, either at the national or transnational level.

Beck's Cosmopolitanization

In various pieces, Beck (2004; 2011) and his colleague (Beck & Sznaider, 2006) suggest that the issues underpinning scholarly debates related to cosmopolitanism are as much methodological as they are conceptual. For example, Beck & Sznaider (2006) claim, "Cosmopolitanism is, of course, a contested term...The boundaries separating it from competitive terms like globalization, transnationalism, universalism, glocalization etc. are not distinct and internally it is traversed by all kind of fault lines" (p. 2). They claim that, although scholars recognize cosmopolitanism has to be situated within the context of globalization, many theoretical engagements with the term continue to rely on what they call "methodological nationalism" (Beck & Sznaider, 2006, p. 2-3; Beck 2004; 2011). In other words, theorists often advance their own national values as "universal," either implicitly or explicitly.

In terms of conceptualization, Beck (2004) attempts to mitigate the confusion related to the conceptualization of cosmopolitanism by classifying related studies as “normative-political” (or “normative” or “philosophical” as he calls it earlier in the piece) and “analytical-empirical,” which he also calls “cosmopolitan perspectives” and “descriptive-analytical” (p. 132, 139). He claims the appeal of the latter approach is that it could remain “value-free” (Beck, 2004, p. 139), whereas the former runs the risk of “fusing the ideal with the real...[because what] cosmopolitanism *is* cannot ultimately be separated from what cosmopolitanism *should be*” (Beck & Sznaider, 2006, p. 4, their emphasis). As discussed above, due to the historical tendency to equate cosmopolitanism with universalism and universalism with national (Western) social norms, such as Christianity among Europeans in the 18th century, cosmopolitanism has faced a crisis of legitimacy in speaking to non-Western ontological and epistemological conceptualizations of universal norms. He says, “The normative and political meanings of cosmopolitanism have wandered through world history completely entangled in the enemy image drawn up by its national opponents” (Beck, 2004, p. 133). He emphasized “national opponent” to later draw distinctions between “*actual existing cosmopolitanization*” (Beck, 2004, p. 133) and other nationalistic forms of cosmopolitanism, like “*unconscious*,” “*passive*,” or “banal” (p. 134, his emphasis).

Beck (2004; 2011; Beck & Sznaider, 2006) argues that “actually existing cosmopolitanization” could not only be studied empirically but it could also avoid normative claims based on “methodological nationalism.” Beck (2004; 2011; Beck & Sznaider, 2006) states that cosmopolitanization and globalization are similar processes but scholars tend to mistakenly limit the term globalization to economic processes and

global financial crises. He claims that some scholars use the word globalization as synonymous with globalism, which he conceptualizes as the promotion neoliberal economic policies, such as open markets and the unchecked flows of capital (Beck, 2004, p. 136; Dallmayr, 2012, p. 173), while the former actually denotes the growing interconnectedness of social actors who are exposed to universal risks. The distinction between globalization and cosmopolitanization that Beck & Sznaider (2006) propose is rather vague: the former takes place “out there,” while the latter “from within” (p. 9). Cosmopolitanization occurring from within is related to social actors, social movements, media, governments, global institutions, and so forth coming together to deliberate about universal risks, including AIDS, GMOs, BSE, nuclear disasters, global terror, water resources, financial crises, computer viruses, immigration issues, climate change, and environmental holocaust (Beck, 2004). In other words, cosmopolitanization is the acknowledgement of globalization and the dialogues and collaborations it has enabled to address the inherent consequences of this interconnectedness.

Beck (2004) claims that the process of cosmopolitanization involves not only the actors and institutions that promote neoliberal economic policies worldwide but also the actors who protest neoliberalism and advance other forms of globalism (economic globalization). This contention contributes to what he called “*institutionalize cosmopolitanism*,” or the development of supranational organizations, like the UN Security Council, which, he opines, people believe is “speaking for humanity as a whole” (Beck, 2004, p. 136). I would venture to say that as many people, if not more, would say that the UN General Assembly is attempting to speak for humanity as a whole and the UN Security Council is more concerned with maintaining its privilege in global

governance. Beck (2004) appears receptive to Kant's idea that the progression of cosmopolitanism would be the eventual establishment of a system of global governance, while ignoring the empirical reality that some voices within these supranational organizations are more privileged than others and are able to speak over those representing differentiated, adverse experiences under globalism. At this point, one recalls imperial dynamics that have historically played out under the auspices of cosmopolitanism.

Beck (2004) attempts to distinguish "a *cosmopolitan perspective*" from the current processes unfolding, "(latent) *cosmopolitanization of reality*," which he identifies as general reactions to the "(forced) mixing of cultures" (p. 137, his emphasis) that has occurred throughout history, including the following examples:

rule through all the plunder and conquests, the migrations, slave trade and colonization, the ethnic cleansing, settlements and expulsions. From its very beginnings, the world market required this global mixing and – as the opening of Japan and China in the nineteenth century shows – imposed it when necessary by violent means (Beck, 2004, p. 137).

One example of the mixing of cultures in the contemporary global society is what he calls "banal cosmopolitanism," which involves the "cultural consumption" of ethnically distinctive food and/or music, for example (Beck, 2004, p. 133). According to Dallmayr (2012), Fish (1997) cites a similar dynamic to Beck's (2004) banal cosmopolitanism that the former calls "boutique multiculturalism," in which the "glitter of cultural difference sells well," like the consumption of "'black music'... 'black culture, styles, and creativity are sold here to a public that knows no borders'" (as cited in Dallmayr, 2012, p. 174). Similarly, Roudometof (2005) suggests, "artefacts and commercial establishments that bring other cultures into close proximity to their own...[is] a process referred to in contemporary debates as "McDonaldization" or "Americanization" or, more broadly, as

“cultural imperialism”” (p. 121). I mention this because banal cosmopolitanism is part of the contemporary elitist form of cosmopolitanism related to consumer culture, which has historic roots in the colonial period as well. However, Beck’s (2004) theorization emphasizes intentional forms of cosmopolitanism, ‘cosmopolitan intent,’ which he marks as distinct from cosmopolitanism as an “unforeseen *side effect*” (p. 132, his emphasis) of systems that function under globalization, including mixed cultural consumerism or banal cosmopolitanism.

While I acknowledge that shared risks may unite people from all over the world, what about issues that are not perceived to result in eminent disaster, especially by those who hold a privileged relationship vis-à-vis the groups of people most at risk? Beck (2004) discusses poverty but he does so simply to demonstrate that it is made “invisible” in studies based on “methodological nationalism” (p. 148-149) but he does not discuss how women are more vulnerable to poverty and to other abuses related to globalization (exploitation in sweatshops and sex trafficking). Women are conspicuously absent from his discussion of cosmopolitanization, although they are deeply connected to the risk society, not only because they are often some of the most vulnerable populations, but also because they continue to face social constraints to participating in dialogues related to these risk, including poverty, lack of access to ICT, and impediments to involvement in public sphere, such as less disposable time due to their disproportionate share of household responsibilities. Should a concern for the whole of humanity not necessarily encompass the perspectives of those most vulnerable to abuses in the globalized world?

Another issue is his characterization of “global” risks—AIDS, GMOs, BSE, nuclear disasters, global terror, water resources, financial crises, computer viruses,

immigration issues, climate change, and environmental holocaust (Beck, 2004). The risks he cites beg the question of whether these risks are not more relevant to certain populations. For example, are the world's rural poor likely to be targeted in a terrorist attack? Some of these global "terrorists" may believe that they are standing up for the rights of people who have been disenfranchised by Beck's (2004; 2011; Beck & Sznaider, 2006) "neoliberal globalism" and for people who have been displaced by the nation-state system. Furthermore, some activists, like those involved in Occupy movements, see "neoliberal globalism" as an instrument of domination by the West and as the principal contributor to global financial crises, which they view as the most virulent risk of "cosmopolitanization" (Hosseini, 2013). Do Occupy movements have an equal voice to transnational corporations and banks that profit from "neoliberal globalism?"

Furthermore, Beck's (2004) discussion of global institutions gives me pause. If he thinks that the UN Security Council speaks for "humanity as a whole," is he not denying the privileged positions of certain countries within supranational organizations like the United Nations? To have a productive conversation about "intentional" cosmopolitanization, one cannot leave out the people most negatively affected by globalization or it becomes a hollow theory about spreading Western values, even if it is through "global" risks, some of which are more pertinent to Western countries, like BSE and terrorism, rather than geography or identity. While Beck (2004) claims that engagement with global risks demonstrates "actually existing cosmopolitanism" and "moral responsibility for everyone" (Calhoun, 2008, p. 429), he fails to acknowledge that some people are in greater peril and these same people may have fainter voices in deliberations concerning these risks.

This subsection has discussed Beck's (2004, 2011; Beck & Sznaider 2006) attempts to move away from normative, philosophical discussions of cosmopolitanism toward a heuristic theory of how cosmopolitanization can be studied through reactions to global risks at various societal and transnational levels. The next subsection will discuss Calhoun's (2008) critique of Beck's cosmopolitanization (2004, 2011; Beck & Sznaider 2006) and why he believes that attempts to promote cosmopolitanism can only realistically be accomplished at the societal or national level.

Calhoun's "Methodological Nationalism"

Calhoun (2008) calls for more systematic uses of the term cosmopolitanism, noting the etymological basis of "cosmos refers to the whole" (p. 428). He claims that using the term as an adjective, to categorize a person or place, often obscures the underlying "extraordinary growth of connection among human beings and variously organized social groups" (Calhoun, 2008, p. 428-429), what Beck refers to as cosmopolitanization. Calhoun (2008) uses the term to discuss collective identity politics within nations rather than individual identity formation, which sets his work apart from other theories of cosmopolitanism that presume it to be an individual (Western) characteristic. He thus sees it as a national political project rather than an international one because he emphasizes that "others" within the same cultural groups in the same nation have not even come to terms with their shared identity (humanity) so, he argues, how could cosmopolitanism be possible on a global scale? However, could this not be more appropriately categorized as a theory related to critical cultural studies, since he is ignoring his own advice by approaching the cosmos as a nation (locality) rather than as a "whole"?

He claims that cosmopolitanism should be perceived more as an “escape from the constraints of cultural prejudice than a production of cultural capacity for interaction and integration” (Calhoun, 2008, p. 441). While I agree that this is important, I would argue that his conceptualization is similar to positive and negative rights, which denote that people within cultures should be free from ethnic prejudice (negative right) but what about the more global perspectives of people who believe that common values and a shared sense of humanity (positive rights) are possible across transnational boundaries? Furthermore, if everyone agreed that “shared humanity” is an important starting point, this could perhaps address the issue of “cultural prejudice” within and between national contexts. His characterization also limits reluctant cosmopolitans, those with the capacity to refrain from bigotry, to multicultural societies, which reinforces the proposition that cosmopolitanism is only possible in Western countries. Calhoun (2008) acknowledges that part of the problem within contexts is the “general orientation to difference” (p. 445), which could be a result of the spread of the Western conceptualization of difference as deficiency as well as dominant cultures pushing back against their perceived loss of privilege in “multicultural” societies. I am not saying that other cultures do not also display xenophobia, racism, and ethnocentrism but Western civilization has been built upon the hierarchical conceptualization of difference based on Western superiority. Calhoun (2008) also distinguishes between cosmopolitans and a particular group of “multinational cosmopolitan elite” (Calhoun, 2008, p. 443), which he claims is critical to reproducing national identity in poor and post-colonial nations. Calhoun’s (2008) reference to these elites substantiates my claim that much of the scholarly commitment to cosmopolitanism has not progressed far from its Enlightenment roots in affluence,

Eurocentricism, and imperialism, which established a foundation for the more recent connections to cultural colonialism and social capital modeled by and enabled through the transnational elite class.

The scholarly preoccupation with tolerance is perhaps related to the dominant Western conceptualization of difference, which frames it as a problem to be overcome rather than an aspect of human social configurations and identities to be celebrated. Barlas (2002) has noted the Western conceptualization of difference in regard to gender relations, which she characterized as “A and non-A,” rather than “A and B” (p. 136), but this dynamic could also be applied to differences in race, sexual orientation, religion, and so forth. In this equation A is the dominant cultural figure (male, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, and middle class) and everyone else in the category of “non-A” is perceived not as dissimilar but as deficient. Mills (2007) also suggests that this perception of difference creates a hierarchy based on difference vis-à-vis the “A” prototype in which, at least in the context of the United States, white women are below white men but above non-white males and women of color are at the bottom of this hierarchy due to their gendered and racial “deficiencies” (p. 173). Consequently, I disagree with Calhoun (2008) that cosmopolitanism should be linked to identity politics or national-based projects related to greater multicultural tolerance because, while it could promote tolerance for one’s neighbor, it may not contribute to one seeing her neighbor as an equal member of humanity, which I believe is at the heart of cosmopolitanism. His project to reimagine difference is admirable but it ignores the larger expanses of the cosmos. It also tends to localize cosmopolitanism as an issue for multicultural (Western) states and, again, sidesteps the important distinction between cosmopolitanism and racial ethnic

tolerance: the sense of shared humanity. Furthermore, according to Putnam (2007), since more diverse communities actually demonstrate higher levels of racial intolerance (Onyx et al., 2011, p. 62), his piece presents yet another failed attempt to locate cosmopolitanism and begs the question of, if tolerance cannot be achieved on a localized scale in Western nations, how is it possible on a grander one? Perhaps the distinction lies in promoting common humanity rather than tolerating difference.

This subsection demonstrates that the contentiousness between nationalism and cosmopolitanism has not progressed much in the several centuries that it has been debated by scholars. Western scholars have typically concluded that the lack of tolerance for “others” within national contexts precludes any possibility of cosmopolitanism being projected onto the cosmos (the global). The next subsection will discuss what some scholars have neglected in their studies of globalization processes and/or national projects toward greater tolerance of difference—the simultaneous localness and globalness of cosmopolitanism, which was part of its philosophical underpinnings when the term was originally introduced as a universal form of consciousness, that has been conceptualized in contemporary literature as “vernacular cosmopolitanism.”

Vernacular Cosmopolitanism

Werbner (2006) claims that vernacular cosmopolitanism does not contradict the less rooted forms of Western cosmopolitanism that are often the focus of studies related to the concept (also see Tomlinson, 1999; Pollock et al., 2000; Szerszynski and Urry, 2002). She claims, “vernacular ethnic rootedness does not negate openness to cultural difference or the fostering of a universalist civic consciousness and a sense of moral responsibility beyond the local” (Werbner, 2006, p. 497). For example, many of the rights

that people called for during the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions are not distinct from those noted by Appiah (1998): “equal dignity...and the rule of law” (Werbner, 2006, p. 497). These are not abstract Western concepts but basic human needs with which most people can agree despite their divergent political, religious, cultural, racial, gender, socioeconomic, and other positionalities. As Cook (2012) says, vernacular cosmopolitanism is related to people’s simultaneous dedication to the local and the global; thus people in Tunisia and Egypt fought for basic political rights within their local community, rights that they believed to be human rights to which all of humanity should be entitled.

Kymlicka and Walker (2012) promote a similar concept known as “rooted cosmopolitanism,” which “attempts to maintain the commitment to moral cosmopolitanism, while revisiting earlier commitment to a world state or a common global culture, and affirming the enduring reality and value of cultural diversity and local or national self-government” (p. 3). Relatedly, Cohen (1992) states that rooted cosmopolitans “accept a multiplicity of roots and branches...that rests on the legitimacy of plural loyalties, of standing in many circles, but with common ground” (Tarrow, 2005, p. 7). These forms of cosmopolitanism suggest that there are certain aspects of existence that humanity as a whole shares in common. It is in working out the particulars, like religious and economic rights, that projects are abandoned as untenable. For example, the universalism project generally falls apart when people begin discussing positive economic rights—housing, education, and work—which is perhaps the result of dedication to Western individualism that has enshrined basic (negative) political rights but also the right to die in poverty. Basu (2000) notes this in conjunction with transnational feminist

discussions in which feminists from the North typically prioritized “civil and political rights” at the top of their agenda, while Southern feminists rank “poverty, inequality, and basic needs” (p. 70) among the most crucial issues facing women. Yet there are certain issues on which feminists from everywhere can agree, such as eradicating gender-based violence, which are important purchases upon which interlocutors could build larger connections, discussions, and possibly consensus on some issues.

I highlighted these offshoots of cosmopolitanism in this section, vernacular cosmopolitanism and rooted cosmopolitanism, because they more appropriately convey how the term was conceptualized in ancient times and they inform how I frame cosmopolitanism in this thesis. In my opinion, any discussion of cosmopolitanism is futile if one cannot establish a common ground or starting point. I would suggest that all people have some affinity for self-governing and supporting the dignity of all people. The respect for difference is also a key factor in reestablishing the deteriorated common ground of humanity, which, I would posit, could be promoted through civil dialogue in non-threatening spaces. The next section will present tangible ways this type of dialogue can occur among dissimilar people in cyberspaces through what I call cosmopolitan praxis, or more specifically vernacular cosmopolitan praxis.

Cosmopolitan Praxis

Like Cook (2012), I am concerned with the lack of attention to class, gender, and sexuality in literature related to cosmopolitanism. Studies related to Muslim cosmopolitanism, which typically locate it as an affinity among Muslim communities in the West, reinforce the idea that it is a Western propensity, inaccessible to non-Westerners unless they come into contact with Western values and lifestyles. The lack of

studies focusing on cosmopolitanism among non-Western populations encouraged me to examine the discussions of Muslim women in social media to discover whether or not they exhibit cosmopolitan tendencies. Studying these women in online spaces also addresses the paucity of studies related to gender, although not simply gender, but stigmatized, racialized groups of women. Scholarly literature on cosmopolitanism also largely remains theoretical thus, following Cook (2012), Roudometof (2005), and Mau et al. (2008), I recognize the importance of contributing to empirical studies, especially qualitative examinations, of cosmopolitanism. With the exceptions of the qualitative studies conducted by Cook (2012), Christensen (2011), and Werbner (1999), the empirical studies I have encountered are based on large-scale national surveys of Western populations, one of which I will discuss below.

In the survey data that Mau et al. (2008) use to measure the cosmopolitanism of thousands of Germans, they hypothesize that “transnational experiences” will contribute to the “proliferation of cosmopolitan attitudes” (Mau et al., 2008, p. 3). They state,

Cosmopolitanism...is conceived as a particular worldview characterized by the capacity to mediate between different cultures, the recognition of increasing interconnectedness of political communities and...we apply the concepts of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism at the micro-level and ask whether people’s cross-border linkages and activities have an impact on their attitudinal stances (Mau et al., 2008, p. 2).

Their interest in cosmopolitanism, following Robbins (1998), is related to “actual existing cosmopolitanism” (Mau et al., 2008, p. 4), which they perceive “arises through the interrelated processes of increased connectivity and cultural contact” (Kwok-Bun, 2002 as cited in Mau et al., 2008, p. 5). Some of the survey questions tend to limit cosmopolitanism to multicultural tolerance and their shifts between “transnationalism” and “cosmopolitanism” suggest that they view the terms as somewhat analogous,

although Beck (2004) might argue these terms mark the important difference between “actually existing” and “reluctant” cosmopolitanism.

My hesitation with the approach of the Mau et al. (2008) study is less conceptual, apart from their conflation of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism, than it is methodological. Although I agree with how they define cosmopolitanism—“the capacity to mediate between different cultures,” for example—and their desire to empirically study these propensities, the details of the methodology, including the interview schedule, are vague. For example, in asking Germans about their connections and/or stays “abroad,” it is unclear if this includes travel and contacts within the European Union, which could be a short trip away, similar to Americans travelling between states. I also do not think that telephone interviews are conducive to people openly discussing sensitive topics but, at the same time, I am not certain that the interview questions are sensitive enough to encourage reactionary responses. Since cultural openness and tolerant attitudes are considered positive propensities, Germans would be unlikely to express intolerance through phone interviews (see Hadaway et al., 1993), particularly due to the xenophobia and racism that was attached to the culture during World War II, but perhaps Germans might express lower levels of tolerance through anonymous mail surveys. Furthermore, if the interviewers had asked them about specific subgroups in Germany, like the Turks, for example, they may have articulated less tolerant attitudes. Likewise, the French would probably express tolerance for other cultures but, if an interviewer asked some of them about the right of Muslim women to wear hijab or niqab, particularly through anonymous surveys, their answers may denote less tolerance, as was the case in online responses to the NiqaBitch protest in which people had the freedom to offer their opinions

anonymously. In some cases, globalization and the associated migration between nations contribute to reactionary nationalist movements, as have been the case throughout Europe (Kaldor, 2004; Mau et al., 2008; Blaagaard, 2010), and heightened racism and xenophobia. Mau et al. (2008) also note that “virtual travel” through ICTs could contribute to cosmopolitan attitudes (also see Szerszynski and Urry 2006) but it was not included in their study. This thesis takes the position that online discussions and “virtual travel” could be important indicators of cosmopolitan attitudes as was the case in regard to the NiqaBitch protest.

In another article, Roudometof (2005) operationalizes cosmopolitanism in a distinctive way from the methodology of the Mau et al. (2008) study, but his engagement with the concept remains theoretical despite his similar effort to unveil “actually existing cosmopolitanism.” Roudometof (2005) renders cosmopolitanism empirically through a continuum of attachments to the local and the transnational, which he advances as a better way to conceptualize cosmopolitanism than through the binary of cosmopolitan/local. Roudometof (2005) states, “individuals can adopt an open, encompassing attitude or a closed, defensive posture” (p. 121), which he says that Hannerz (1990) labeled as cosmopolitan and local, respectively. He rejects this binary, offering the example of people who are patriots without being ethnocentric and suggests yet another qualifier to bypass the local/cosmopolitan dichotomy: “glocalized cosmopolitanism” (Roudometof, 2005, p. 121; also see Szerszynski and Urry, 2002), which has also been called “rooted,” “situated,” and “vernacular.” Roudometof (2005) states that the term “glocalized cosmopolitanism” could be operationalized by “degrees of attachment” plotted on a “global-local continuum” (p. 124). While his empirical

approach to the study of cosmopolitanism is admirable, the factors that he uses to operationalize the continuum are suspect: for instance, different degrees of attachment to locality, state, local culture, and economic/cultural protectionism. These measures do not reveal who would be counted within the ranks of glocalized cosmopolitanism. Are the people who fall in the middle quasi-glocalized cosmopolitans? According to Cook (2012), who uses Roudometof's (2005) model to map the continuum among Pakistani expatriate development workers in Canada through her analysis employing in-depth interviews,

Whether or not it is...useful in studying the cosmopolitan realities of differently classed groups is a topic for further research. In this case the continuum enables me to map the complex repertoire of local and cosmopolitan allegiances that characterize a culture of cosmopolitanism, while demonstrating an overarching cosmopolitan orientation (p. 14).

Roudometof's (2005) measures led me to consider Libertarians who may be strongly against local governmental interference and market protectionism but fervently patriotic—thus would they fall into the quasi-glocalized category, despite their rejections of governmental and economic interventions being closely linked to their patriotism rather than their concern for others within and outside of their local and national communities?

Although I take issue with the way Mau et al. (2008) and Roudometof (2005) operationalized cosmopolitanism, the project of examining cosmopolitanism empirically, what I call vernacular cosmopolitan praxis, should not be abandoned. Scholars have begun to empirically examine various communities and subgroups to determine the extent of their cosmopolitan affiliations but there continues to be relatively few studies and the problems with devising appropriate measures remain, especially due to the range of theories that underpin cosmopolitanism. Like Roudometof (2005) and Mau et al. (2008), I do not perceive cosmopolitanism as an abstract normative (Western) concept or

an identity, but as an ideal that can be empirically studied, in this case, through online interactions.

I generally use two terms to situate dialogues that reflect vernacular cosmopolitan praxis: cosmopolitan opportunities, which are related to dialogue that has the potential to bridge distinctive groups; and cosmopolitan aesthetics, which is related to universalizing conduct among (dissimilar) people online and offline through online discussions and activism and through expressing commitment to one's own values but acceptance of others' views. When I refer to a person as cosmopolitan, I am referring to someone who has exhibited one or more of these tendencies through her praxis: remaining true to her own beliefs yet accepting the divergent beliefs of others; expanding the transnational connective memory to include the voices of Muslim women; offering countersentences to dominant political and religious discourses; connecting dissimilar people (or creating cosmopolitan opportunities); engaging in civil dialogue with dissimilar people; and promoting a certain level of comportment among people online and/or offline and/or mapping basic standards of behavior that could be universally agreed upon among dissimilar people. In reference to dissimilar people, they could be cultural "others" but, since religion comprises an important part of otherness, they could also be religious others within the same religion. These forms of praxis are consistent with the way Molz (2006) discusses cosmopolitanism and perhaps how vernacular cosmopolitan praxis can be operationalized: "cosmopolitan claims to world citizenship are imagined through a cultural or aesthetic disposition toward difference – a sense of tolerance, flexibility and openness toward otherness that characterizes an ethics of social relations in an interconnected world" (p. 2).

This research will address several gaps in the literature related to cosmopolitanism. Returning to the ancient roots of the term rather than the theoretical engagements with cosmopolitanism during and after the Enlightenment period that are drenched in colonialism and Eurocentrism (Werbner, 1999, p. 17), there is no impasse regarding attachments to both local and global societies (Cook, 2012; Lawrence, 2010). It does involve resistance to the Euro-American conceptualization of difference, which tends toward hierarchies (Mills, 2007). This study will attempt to address the lack of adequate engagement with gender in literature related to cosmopolitanism, although most of the dialogue analyzed here stems from people within a specific socioeconomic group, which Polson (2011) frames in her study of the new transnational middle (in some cases, perhaps upper middle) class. The geographical limitations of many of the studies and theories related to cosmopolitanism imply that non-Westerners were driven toward non-local spaces because they were sufficiently non-local not to want to live “locally” or that their cosmopolitan perspectives were a product of having been exposed to “tolerant” multicultural Western spaces (see Notar 2008). My study will decenter cosmopolitan potential from a minute focus on Western people and communities of non-Westerners in the West to the possibility of locating cosmopolitan dialogue in transnational cyberspaces among non-Westerners living in non-Western countries.

This section has described cosmopolitan praxis (as well as opportunities and aesthetics), which I have encountered in dialogue among gendered, non-elitist non-Westerners living in non-Western contexts. I have explained attempts to empirically examine cosmopolitanism and ways that my study will address some of the gaps in this literature, especially the Eurocentricism that tends to inform theoretical engagement with

cosmopolitanism and the lack of qualitative empirical studies. The next section will address whether or not transnational cyberspaces are appropriate places for studying vernacular cosmopolitan praxis and whether or not these spaces and the underlying networks contribute to vernacular cosmopolitan praxis.

Cosmopolitan Potential of Social Media

People in general are not remiss to reflect on spaces as cosmopolitan: cosmopolitan New York, for example. How has this cosmopolitan space materialized? It is a megacity that people from throughout the world inhabit but they often live in clusters with others like them, sometimes by choice and other times due to local cultural constraints. Some would call themselves “New Yorkers,” despite their divergent ethnic roots, and some might call themselves “Iranian New Yorkers” or “Iranian Americans.” These are ways to situate one’s self through multiple allegiances or consciousnesses, not just to New York and/or Iran but also to other “Iranian New Yorkers.” She is claiming her ethnic roots and her new home as equal affiliations as well as her connections to a subculture within the United States. This may also be true of a Palestinian living in Amman who might call herself a Palestinian Jordanian. She is invoking multiple places and a plurality of allegiances. It is not uncommon for people in and outside of the West to claim multiple allegiances but somehow many of the studies of cosmopolitanism do not stray geographically from the Northwest section of the globe. In this section I will discuss other important spaces for studying cosmopolitanism: transnational cyberspaces.

I will posit that people who participate in social media production and consumption are to some extent connecting with others, although some do limit their connections to localized groups. As such, to employ Beck’s (2004; 2011; Beck &

Sznaider 2006) terms, they are engaging in cosmopolitanization (globalization) but they are not necessarily engaging in “intentional cosmopolitanization.” On the other hand, some people, who Wise (2009) calls “traversal enablers” (Onyx et al., 2011, p. 52), make a concerted effort to reach out to “others.” It is possible that the connections of traversal enablers to unintentional cosmopolitan producers and consumers may lead to introspection and change within networks and result in the farther-reaching evolution of larger networks, which I discuss more in Chapter 5.

There are several features of social media that make them rich environments for studying cosmopolitanism, including its entanglements with Eurocentricism and elitism. Benedikter and Fitz (2011) highlight the “equal opportunity” (p. 62) that social media provide as well as their potential to decentralize information through offering alternative channels to conventional, politically-embedded media. They also offer cautionary tales related to social media being harnessed as a “hegemonic tool of the elite” (Benedikter & Fitz, 2011, p. 63), although they claims that current trends suggest, “new media is [*sic*] shifting focus from the external to some sense of interiority not just of an individual, but also between individuals. Media permeates the human brain-mind-self and the social realm, thus evolving into a “trans-” or even “meta-social” concept” (Benedikter & Fitz, 2011, p. 64). They highlight forms of introspection at both individual and collective levels, which relate to how people view their belongings to local and global communities and how they imagine these communities should/could be. Benedikter and Fitz (2011) also point out, quoting Keohane and Nye (1998), that the decentralization of information contributes to “new electronic feudalism with overlapping communities and jurisdictions laying claim to multiple layers of citizens’ identities and loyalties” (p. 65), which is how I

envision the theater of vernacular cosmopolitanism. Perhaps this feudalism could also suggest diasporic consciousness but the same dynamic is present among those who have never left their homelands: for example, among the Muslim women in the Arab world who advance universal basic standards of women's rights, sometimes grounded in religious rights, through activism toward reforming laws and bolstering civil rights.

Benedikter and Fitz (2011) also note the importance of social media in the promotion of "soft power," or convincing individuals to agree to social norms related to comportment. This is what Foucault (1977) refers to as the creation of docile bodies that, as time progresses, no longer require the threat of state violence to ensure their compliance because social institutions and networks reinforce the strictures of behaviors, which were initially imposed through state surveillance and spectacles of violence. Nonetheless, Foucault (1967/2009) also recognized spaces outside of the strictures of socially-imposed norms, which he refers to as heterotopia spaces, such as mental hospitals and prisons (as cited in Jansson, 2009). Social media, as part of the "space-communication nexus" (Jansson, 2009), could also create heterotopian spaces. Some people use these spaces to troll (Jansson, 2013), while in face-to-face encounters they would be unlikely, for example, to call someone a fascist to her face (see Chapter 4) despite her position on sensitive topics. This dynamic has to do with the at times pervasive lack of social inhibitions (and politeness) in anonymous environments. People also use these spaces to draw attention to injustices where it is taboo to speak out against them in public spaces even when the abuses are in plain sight. Heterotopian spaces can also challenge information control by advancing knowledge as a social construct (Benedikter & Fitz, 2011). In the same vein, one could see social media as an affront to

state and corporate power over information disseminated through conventional media, which are more susceptible to corporate-political control (Tremayne, 2007; O'Neil, 2009), especially due to the role of social media serving as watchdogs over conventional media. As I will discuss promptly, people have also used social media to challenge or subvert religious authority (Anderson, 2003; Kofman, 2005), misinterpretations of the Qur'an, political discourse, and social norms.

Although social media can serve as heterotopian spaces to challenge social and state surveillance and control, this potential should not be uncritically lauded (Dartnell, 2003; Atton, 2004). Social media have clearly decentered media consumption, “*fixtures*,” as Jansson (2013) calls them, or “gathering places” (Adams, 1992), “within the everyday communicative fabric” (Jansson, 2013, p. 288, his emphasis). Jansson (2013) offers the comparison between social media and the television when it was first introduced, which provided people with a common meeting place despite it being located in each household’s living room, to illustrate the distinctions between televised meeting places and what is currently available through the internet. However, Jansson (2013) suggests that social media could also be used as spaces for social surveillance, including constant “checking in” and the imperative to divulge personal information to participate in online spaces (May, 2002). In regard to cosmopolitanism in cyberspaces, Jansson (2013) claims that various aspects of the social media networks discourage people from circulating within unknown online environments, such as the “negation of hospitality,” what I call trolling, and “connection strategies,” which rarely entail social media users visiting cyberspaces to meet strangers (p. 290). According to Jansson (2013), quoting Tomlinson (1999), “mobile, networked media function not so much as *technologies of cosmos*, but

rather as *technologies of the hearth*, involving high degrees of peer-to-peer monitoring” (p. 290, his emphasis), employing the example of Swedish social media users as the basis of his empirical work.

Aside from the obstacles mentioned above, Jansson (2013) claims there are two main obstacles to cosmopolitanism within social media environments: social actors must be willing to not only show interest in “others” but also to exhibit hospitality in their interactions, which he already acknowledged was lacking; and the fragmentation of the “post-/late modern subjectivity,” as well as that which is created by neoliberal globalism, I would suggest, “provide a reactionary moment to social de-differentiation and reembedding” (p. 292-293). Reembedding is a pervasive reaction but some people and activists are equally likely to employ their multiple attachments to grow their network base. Hosseini (2013), for example, discusses the “transversalist” claims associated with the Occupy movement to illustrate that some people see the context of globalization as a moment to advance different but complementary grievances against global hegemonic forces. He defines transversalism as “a conscious effort to lessen disparities, achieve equity, avoid violence, and enhance autonomy and democracy by creatively crossing (or redrawing) boundaries that mark politicized divisions” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 428). Hosseini (2013) also states that some Occupy movements use symbols from the Arab Revolts to express their solidarity with politically oppressed people in other parts of the world, which demonstrates the cosmopolitan praxis of the Occupy platform.

In contrast to the cosmopolitanism of the Occupy platform, Blaagaard (2010) notes the increase in right-wing and populist insurgency groups that have accompanied the expansion and globalization of ICTs. Although her prognosis in regard to social

media contributing to cosmopolitan praxis is sanguine, analyzing social media use in Denmark and the Netherlands as the foci of her study, her version of cosmopolitanism appears to focus on local societies rather than global ones, relating cosmopolitan praxis to the potential of citizen journalism. In framing “citizen journalism,” she claims that it involves the “right to speak but also the obligation to listen...and understand others in order to live convivially in a common society” (Blaagaard, 2010, p. 5) Within the category of citizen journalism, she includes citizens who share their “knowledge and experiences...during times of crises,” “political and issue-based” blogs, and “online opinion and visual expression [that] may take the much looser form of viral life and develop in rhizomatic structures” (Blaagaard, 2010, p. 5), most of which I will take up in the subsequent chapters. Similar to what Benedikter and Fitz (2011) say about social media challenging the control of information through advancing knowledge as a social construction, Blaagaard (2010) claims that, since journalism is central to the “construction of cultural citizenship,” citizen journalism is able to challenge the “selective amnesia” (p. 5) of conventional media that bolsters exclusionary citizenship. Although she emphasizes that social media are embedded “in histories and practices of commercialisation, market, and regulatory control...[and therefore] have ways of controlling and gate-keeping the content,” these gate-keeping mechanisms have little control over “viral cultural representations...based on the interests of the viewers, the number of ‘clicks’... and the viewers’ decisions to pass on the word” (Blaagaard, 2010, p. 6). Due to the extraneous factors related to the popular mediation of internet memes that are part of the dynamic of social media networks and contribute to “multiplicity in

societies,” Blaagaard (2010) advances, following Gilroy (2004), the possibility of “cosmopolitanism from below” (p. 6).

Although social media use could result in reactionary responses to uncertainty and fragmentation, it is also likely that people who engage in online cosmopolitan praxis could contribute to gradual changes in their immediate networks, which are compounded through network bridging and could lead to more dramatic results over time. Onyx et al. (2011) view cosmopolitanism as the natural progression of “everyday” social media use by linking it to complexity theory, which elucidates the extraneous factors mentioned above that undermine elitist/corporatist gatekeeping, such as the viral capacity of social media networks. Although the form of cosmopolitanism to which they are referring is more akin to the national-level version that Calhoun (2008) discusses, tolerating difference within multicultural communities, they demonstrate how non-politicized environments can foster interactions between cultural others through everyday encounters, which Pratt (1992) calls “contact zones,” such as exchanging recipes or home-grown fruits and vegetables (Onyx et al., 2011, p. 51). They state,

complexity theory...can help explain how small, seemingly random, events can coalesce into emergent patterns without a central controller. When talking about human action this refers to the emergence of new networks and collective action formed from the myriad interpersonal encounters independent of any external authority (Onyx et al., 2011, p. 52).

They posit that two factors are of principal importance in explaining how everyday interactions could lead to greater intercultural understanding: emergence, which relates to “how system-level order spontaneously arises from the action and repeated interaction of lower level system components” (Chiles et al., 2004 as cited in Onyx et al., 2011, p. 54); and self-organization, which explains “how information exchanged between individuals within micropublics houses the potential for a process of adaptation to the environmental

conditions and an adaptive self-organisation structure” (Onxy et al., 2011, p. 54). In other words, “a small divergence in initial conditions leads to significant difference in the evolution of the entire systems, which is evolutionary and unpredictable” (Onxy et al., 2011, p. 55) through bottom-up pressures (emergence), which affect alignments in these self-organizing, non-linear systems. However, in addressing the immense expanses of transnational cyberspaces, ripples on the periphery of localized networks will take some time to reach dominant central clusters.

This section has discussed how there are both opportunities and constraints to vernacular cosmopolitan praxis within social media networks. Some of the dynamics, like social surveillance and trolling, discourage engagements with cultural others online, while other factors, like the neutrality of the environments and the ease of access to everyday interactions, encourage these interplays. Network dynamics, such as emergence and the potential of content to go viral, encourage far-reaching effects so many of the constraints on the potential of social media to enhance cosmopolitan praxis are often individually or socially imposed, such as the reembedding of users into nationalistic reactionary allegiances. The next section will discuss a few pieces of literature directly related to Muslims and cosmopolitanism, or perhaps “Muslim cosmopolitanism,” and how social media may facilitate these forms of cosmopolitanism.

Globally Networked Muslims and Cosmopolitanism

The digital networks related to Islam and Muslims will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, but I will briefly discuss them here, particularly literature related to non-Western Muslim cosmopolitanisms. As mentioned previously, studies of “cosmopolitan Muslims,” based on the myriad of conceptualizations of the term

discussed above, generally locate them within diasporic communities in the West. Tellingly, when I searched Google Scholar for “Arab cosmopolitans” the query did not yield any results but, when I changed the search to “cosmopolitan Arabs,” I got 12 results in February of 2014 (a simple search for cosmopolitan results in 22,500 links); again, demonstrating the continued pervasiveness of Ameri/Eurocentricism in theoretical frameworks related to cosmopolitanism. This is not only true of Arabs. Most other non-Western populations are unlikely to be labeled as cosmopolitans unless they form communities in Western countries and even then there is no guarantee that they would be considered as such. Like Werbner (1999), who attempts to wrestle cosmopolitanism from its elitist underpinnings by labeling working-class Pakistani expatriates as cosmopolitans, I am attempting to non-Westernize the concept, although the conversations of some Western Muslims will also be examined in the chapters to follow.

Leonard (2009), as well as Christensen (2011), Cook (2012) and Werbner (1999), is among the scholars who have studied cosmopolitanism among Muslim expatriates and diasporic communities in the West. I will discuss Leonard’s (2009) work briefly because she not only describes Muslim cosmopolitanism but also how social media has encouraged it in certain cases. Leonard (2009) argues,

Islam and Muslims have long constituted a “world system”...modern nations actually work against transnationalism by producing tensions...that weaken...transnational connections...[thus] transnational forms of Islam are inevitably engaged in losing struggles, particularly in North America and Europe...[however] American forms of Islam can be discerned as the forms of Islam in the West become strongly cosmopolitan rather than transnational (p. 176).

She starts by analyzing two Muslim sects, Ahmadiyya and Nizari, which she selected because they “are designed to be cosmopolitan” (Leonard, 2009, p. 178), noting that they principally operate in the West and in English. However, in regard to the Nizari, she

claims that the “uniqueness that allowed the Nizari Ismailis to adapt many aspects of Western culture...kept them apart from other Muslims” (Leonard, 2009, p. 183). While she claims that the successes of the two minority sects are tenuous, she is enthusiastic about the prospects of dynamic groups of Muslim scholars who challenge traditional Islamic hermeneutics in an attempt to advance the liberatory intent of the Qur’an, including the Muslims for Progressive Values movement (also see Chapter 5). Among these important Islamic scholars, she recognizes the vital contributions of Amina Wadud and Kecia Ali. Although she suggests that some strands of American Islam are signs of the evolution of the religion in Western contexts, it is unclear how much of their messages are disseminated abroad, especially into the Arab world, which I would argue is an important indicator of whether or not these contributions are reaching a significant level of cosmopolitanism.

I did find one piece by Hoesterey (2012) that examined the cosmopolitanism of Muslims outside of the West, an analysis of “Muslim trainers and self-help gurus in Indonesia” who promote “prophetic cosmopolitanism” (p. 40) among their followers. The leaders of these movements frame the Prophet Mohammad as an exemplary figure to emulate for success in the modern world, particularly due to his hardships as an orphan and his entrepreneurial spirit. For them, Mohammad epitomizes “rags to riches” stories (Hoesterey, 2012, p. 46). Hoesterey (2012) claims that these groups do not fit into the category of “counter-cosmopolitans” but he describes their praxis as “tolerance without universalism” (p. 55). He also refers to the movements as an “alternative global discourse” of cosmopolitanism that reflects local beliefs but, since they are offered to publics as commodities, perhaps they fall into the category of banal cosmopolitanism. Many

Muslims throughout the world might agree with some of the messages of these groups so, while they are not what Hoesterey (2012) calls universal (although the narratives of the Prophet could perhaps be universal in less Islamophobic contexts, particularly those that reference his entrepreneurialism), they do contribute a version of “Muslim cosmopolitanism” that mixes psychology and self-help doctrines, which are used in the West in self-healing and assertiveness training, with religious teachings to advance civic duties. These movements appear to promote cosmopolitan praxis through merging multiple ethnic strains and religious doctrine but the cosmopolitan praxis of the messages is undermined by its commodification. I will discuss these movements further, especially why Hoestery (2012) does not consider them “universal,” in the Conclusion.

A few pieces of literature discuss transnational, loosely connected, cosmopolitan Muslim networks, which are particularly pertinent to the subsequent chapters. Both Turner (2007) and Anderson (2003) discuss the contributions of diasporic Muslims who have complemented the “internet galaxy” (Turner, 2007, p. 407; Castells, 2001) with cosmopolitanism and/or Muslim cosmopolitanism (or not in some cases), while Benhabib discusses the Women Living Under Muslim Law network, which highlights cases of women’s rights abuses in an effort to mobilize support. Turner (2007) mainly discusses how economic globalization and Islamophobia have contributed to reactionary movements among Muslims who promote the “re-sacralization” of modern societies (p. 412) but he says that this tendency is common among all of the world religions. Anderson (2003), on the other hand, discusses how a transnational group of pious, middle class Muslims are seeking “piety in new channels” in an effort to understand “Muslim life” in the modern world and challenging the traditional religious authority of the ulama in the

process through offering their own contributions to Islamic knowledge (p. 889). These Muslim diaspora, who he calls the “technological adepts” (Anderson, 2003, p. 896) and the “internal diaspora” (Anderson, 2003, p. 899), often Arabs living in other Arab nations, are revolutionizing access to and consumption of religious knowledge. Finally, Benhabib (2010) discusses the successful efforts of the WLUML in thwarting attempts to institute religious arbitration courts in Canada to illustrate how “multilateral convenantalism” may bolster “democratic iterations.”

This section has discussed various manifestations of Muslim cosmopolitanism in scholarly literature. The array of positionalities and cosmopolitan praxes may suggest multiple forms of cosmopolitanism, some that speak more to other Muslims around the world, which I will discuss more in the Conclusion. Although Muslim networks are not often considered in literature related to cosmopolitanism, I would argue that some of them exhibit cosmopolitan praxis despite their circumvention of Western values, places, and identities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the evolution of cosmopolitanism from simultaneous dedication to the local and the cosmos to tropes related to the superiority of Western civilization and subjectivities in connection with Christian and Western empire building. Enlightenment scholars theoretically engaged in rhetoric about the cosmos, while they simultaneously disparaged cultural others. Contemporary Western scholarship continues to advance Western spaces as the localities within which cosmopolitans can be encountered, meanwhile the theoretical underpinnings of rooted and vernacular cosmopolitanism have attempted to excavate the ancient significance of the concept—

attachment to both the local and the global through a shared sense of humanity.

Advancing from vernacular cosmopolitanism and to address some of the limitations of contemporary scholarly engagement with cosmopolitanism, I propose the study of the vernacular cosmopolitan praxis of Muslim women online from both Western and Arab societies, which will be developed in the chapters to follow.

In the subsequent chapters I will highlight various forms of vernacular cosmopolitan praxes. Chapter 3 will discuss how Muslim women are using their digitally enhanced voices to expand the transnational connective memory, which, as cooke (2007) suggests, allows spaces for Muslim women to embrace the Muslimwoman identity and unite in solidarity with other Muslim women but also spaces to reject this identity through debunking stereotypes ascribed to them. Some of the cosmopolitan Muslim women in Chapter 3 are able to address both of these tasks concurrently; they are able to take up the identity while undermining stereotypes related to it, which is illustrated by niqabis who demonstrate that they are true to their own interpretations of Islam but also accepting of divergent Muslim practices and beliefs. Chapter 4 will demonstrate how Muslim women use online spaces to discuss issues that universally affect the lived experiences of women—the stigma of spinsterhood and street harassment—using the narratives of their everyday lives. They are able to address transnational issues through their local experiences and, through sharing their perspectives and narratives online, they are able to counter dominant political and religious discourses with their digital countersentences. Chapter 5 demonstrates how certain networks are more accommodating of various beliefs and practices of Islam. In transnational topical networks, one could study more divergent opinions that disrupt the simply binary of

liberal/traditional (extreme/moderate) that is ascribed to Muslims. The comments that are difficult to compartmentalize within this binary are often the most cosmopolitan perspectives, exhibiting dedication to the commenters' own views but acceptance of the beliefs and practices of others; this is the case in transnational topical network discussions of Muslim lesbians. In homophilic networks, like the hijabi fashion network, although hijabis could more easily reinforce their already strongly held beliefs, comments offered by Muslim women with divergent opinions invite introspection into this quasi-insular space. Chapter 6 highlights several cases of collective action and the extent to which they demonstrate cosmopolitan praxis. The issue of hijab discrimination could be a cosmopolitan opportunity but, in the American context, a few cases of workplace discrimination against hijabis failed to even encourage the solidarity of other hijabis in the same society, while Muslim women on the other side of the world have circulated narratives regarding injustices against hijabis in the United States. This case reveals how socioeconomics and contentiousness related to veiling could impede cosmopolitan collective actions among Muslims locally and transnationally. The Pink Hijab Day movement also had the potential to become a form of cosmopolitan praxis but the purpose shifted toward greater relevance for Muslim women living in Muslim-minority countries. Therefore, it remained a form of Muslim cosmopolitanism because it spread to other countries but it failed to reach a truly cosmopolitan level of collective action because it faced difficulties in mediation into Muslim-majority countries. In this case, the transnational network could have reinforced offline participation in the MENA region in lieu of local organizational support, but the weak hub of the network failed to establish sufficient bridges toward this end. Finally, the organizers of SlutWalk Morocco

contextualized a transnational movement in a local context. Although the organizers changed the name and purpose of the collective action, the local-global dynamics of the movement created a substantial base of support. This was partially due to the universality of the issue that the movement was attempting to address but also the result of the inclusivity of the campaign because the organizers were able to express both local and global allegiances simultaneously. Vernacular cosmopolitan praxis in these cases is not limited to populations residing in the West—it stems from diverse populations around the world toward different ends.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, “Getting Lost in Networks,” discusses in more detail why I decided to focus on topics and collective actions related to Muslim women in transnational spaces rather than the typical studies of online Muslim populations in homophilic networks.

Chapter 2

Getting Lost in Concentric Networks: Connective Content Analysis

The proliferation of digital media and online social networks has enabled Muslim women around the world to develop their own understandings and discourses on Islam and gender relations. Although limited research has been done on the scope and types of Muslim women's activities online, available studies and recent events suggest that the Internet has become a critical site in discussing, challenging, and understanding normative hierarchies of power and authority on both the transnational and community level. Just as the Internet reflects the plurality of Islamic traditions and interpretations, it also highlights a wide spectrum of political, social and religious activity among Muslim women...digital media has empowered women to speak out and take stands on culturally sensitive, political issues...Online sites that specialize in fatwas, or religious legal opinions, have also provided a means for women to ask private questions about religion or culture in a public setting, which they might not be able to do or want to do in a face-to-face encounter. The benefits of the Internet and digital media have also come with the dangers of participating online. Although the United Nations has recently declared access to the Internet as a human right, censorship and online surveillance limit women's access...In addition to government censorship in some countries, Muslim women face other barriers in participating online. Muslim women generally have less access to computers and technology, and English remains the dominant language of the Internet. Despite these current barriers, however, Internet access and digital media are enabling Muslim women to speak out and become their own agents of change.⁹

This quote highlights the opportunities and constraints related to Muslim women's use of social media. While social media have clearly enabled some Muslim women to engage in local and transnational dialogues and collective actions who would not otherwise have a medium to share their voices, due to the aforementioned constraints (see Chapter 1) and others that will be presented throughout this dissertation, social media cannot be perceived as a panacea for women's rights. However, similar to forms of "subtle resistance," which will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, social media offer the promise of gradual change—spaces of hope (Harvey, 2000b) that have the potential to become spaces of change.

Chapter 1 introduced some of the problematics associated with literature on cosmopolitanism, mainly related to the Eurocentricism and imperialism connected with the concept. I settled on the term "vernacular cosmopolitan praxis" to reveal

⁹ <http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/currentissues/digitaltechnology/>

conversations in transnational cyberspaces that could be both rooted in a local context and outward looking toward the cosmos. Cyberspaces offer places that are decentered from typically Western urban spaces in which cosmopolitanism is often investigated but the networks that structure these digital spaces operate under dynamics that are distinct from those in offline spaces. They assume a unique logic that is also of key interest to this research. That being said, this dissertation not only attempts to identify vernacular cosmopolitan praxis within networks but also how the networks themselves facilitate and constrain cosmopolitanism. To this end, some of the methodological questions related to networks that will be taken up in this chapter and subsequent ones are the following: what are the network dynamics that encourage and discourage cosmopolitan praxis? Are certain narratives, dialogues, collective actions, and forms of cosmopolitan praxis, particularly those related to Muslim women, more likely to be mediated within these networks? To what extent is Cooke's (2007) cosmopolitan Muslimwoman (see Chapter 1), both the empowered and the reluctant, reified by the dynamics of various networks? Does cosmopolitan praxis tend to emanate from Western social media networks?

As will be discussed further in Chapter 5, the manners in which online spaces are often studied, in this case in relation to Islam and Muslims, reinforce the vernacular without the cosmopolitan due to the methodological appeal of homogeneous networks, which for online Muslim populations include Islamic forums, websites of online muftis, authoritative blogs related to Islam, and blog clusters from particular locations. Nevertheless, these homogenous networks, which I refer to as homophilic networks in Chapter 5, are not the most appropriate spaces for studying vernacular cosmopolitan praxis among Muslims because there is little interaction between Muslims with divergent

beliefs or between Muslims and non-Muslims. The dynamics of homogenous networks tend to reinforce agreement and root out dissention, exhibiting defensive postures toward divergent opinions, which is perhaps related to the promotion of uniformity in the face of online trolling and offline discrimination perpetrated by Islamophobes and extreme secularists in relation to Muslim communities. Studies of homophilic networks contribute to scholarly and mainstream viewpoints that Muslims are intolerant of non-conformist Islamic opinions and practices and of elements of Western cultures. Moreover, transnational cyberspaces continue to operate under Western (neo-Orientalist?) dominance, illustrated by the extensive use of English and link preferences within the dominant transnational connective memory (see Introduction and Chapter 3), so certain viewpoints are more conducive to mediation than others, which will be discussed further in Chapter 3. Sometimes the mediated viewpoints are the most consistent with Western values and others are extremely oppositional to reinforce the incongruence between the East and the West. These dilemmas bring me to my research questions related to the methodologies underpinning research of Muslim social media networks: are the narratives and conversations of Muslim women social media users qualitatively different in transnational online spaces that are not oriented specifically to Muslims or Muslim women? If transnational networks and homogenous networks do exhibit differing tendencies toward cosmopolitan praxis, what social dynamics contribute to the appeal of each of these types of networks? What are the online social dynamics that foster and impede the mediation of the narratives, conversations, and collective actions in transnational spaces?

This chapter will discuss the methodology underpinning my data collection and the research design. I will offer a brief discussion of qualitative content analysis before situating how I expanded upon this method by introducing network underpinnings. In this case, I collected ten datasets, starting with a topic (artificial hymen) and the American node of a transnational network (hijabi fashion) related to an Islamic practice, which were both discussed in the blog postings of Muslim women. This initial topic and node linked to other discussions of topics and online/offline collective actions initiated by or related to Muslim women for which I also collected data. In the process of analyzing the data, I encountered many of the same qualitative thematic codes in the different datasets. Therefore, due to the network bridges that linked these topics and collective actions and the evident overlaps in the qualitative themes, I decided to put the datasets into conversation, creating what I call a connective content analysis. Thus this analysis is connective in the sense that, although social media users may have broached the topics and collective actions within specific networks, there were discussions and people that formed bridges between these topical network clusters. This chapter will outline how I extracted data from the internet and how I analyzed them. The next section will discuss qualitative content analysis broadly and the subsections will outline what Parker et al. (2011) suggest are important elements of content analysis that should be explicitly disclosed as a means of increasing the credibility of the research.

Qualitative Content Analysis

The qualitative content analyses that I conducted for this research are not remarkably different from conventional applications of this method—it is the connective component perhaps that sets it apart from other content analyses. Content analysis

“involves taking data—text—that already exists and subjecting it to a new form of “analysis”” (Schutt, 2006, p. 428). It is a type of “unobtrusive indicator” that can counter the norm of people answering interview questions in socially acceptable ways, for example (Schutt, 2006, p. 108), that I alluded to in Chapter 1 in regard to the Mau et al. (2008) study. Content analyses have been conducted on text in “newspapers articles, speeches, or political conventions” (Schutt, 2006, 430) but using this method to analyze social media demonstrates the significant distinctions between the “collective memory,” or the national archives based on state and corporate-influenced conventional media artifacts that foster cultural cohesion, and the “connective memory” (see Chapter 3), which is the online digital record of dominant discourses and popularly constructed countersentences that challenge the control of information by the elite. The distinction between official discourse and online discourse is sometimes considerable, which will be demonstrated in Chapter 4 in association with official solutions to the Muslim spinsterhood “crisis” the popular responses to these solutions. Whereas Schutt (2006) focuses on content analyses of traditional text and dominant discourse, Adler and Clark (2011) have a much broader sense of the types of texts that could be analyzed through this method, including blogs and chat rooms (also see Attwood, 2009; Donelle & Hoffman-Goetz, 2008).

Content analysis of social media continues to be overrepresented by quantitative studies (Parker et al., 2011) but, while I could provide the number of times I encounter various themes in the datasets, a quantitative analysis would run counter to one of the objectives of this research: that is, privileging the digital self-expression (voice) of Muslim women in social media, which is consistent with what Harding (2002) refers to

as standpoint theory. Replacing their voices with a number would offer more space to discuss the themes that I coded for in the datasets but it would do so at the expense of the textual forms of expression of these women. I present these textual forms of voice to substantiate my conclusions, which I believe is equally valid to providing a quantitative figure. I accept, though, that text is polysemic so I leave it to the reader to agree or not with the claims I make based on the text. As Howard (2002) says,

It can be especially challenging for a researcher to interpret the content of messages sent over new media, since many are text-based and can mean different things to different recipients. Researchers can easily reinterpret or misinterpret these messages if they lack deep knowledge of the individuals and relationships involved (p. 555).

I would argue that providing textual forms of evidence for the conclusions I flesh out of the data is more transparent than allowing numbers to stand in for coded textual passages and it enables useful scholarly critiques based on divergent interpretations of the textual “evidence.” Since this dissertation is a part of an ongoing online ethnography, I am hoping that different readings of the text will contribute to my more nuanced understandings of these online conversations and narratives in the next phases of the research project. I recognize though that the “credibility” (Patton, 1992) of conclusions based on content analyses that are unsupported by triangulation with other methods may face criticisms.

Some researchers have attempted to articulate various factors, apart from credibility, that encourage more rigorous transparency in qualitative content analyses. For example, Parker et al. (2011), who define “QualCA” as a “research method which uses subjective interpretations of content-based phenomena within its context in an inductive iterative process to infer explicit, implicit and/or multiple meanings” (p.2; also see Krippendorff, 1980; Mayring, 2000), attempt to highlight important factors to consider

when conducting online qualitative research. The factors that they suggest should be explicitly detailed include the following: defining research objectives and units of analysis, selecting content, analyzing content, interpretation of content, and drawing conclusions (Parker et al., 2011). While these are quite broad issues, I will address them briefly here and in further detail in the subsections below. One of my methodological objectives is to advance a feminist, antiracist, anti-imperialist research agenda through challenging the idea that cosmopolitanism, liberally defined as one's obligations to dissimilar others through a shared sense of humanity, is generally located in the West as well as disrupting the binary associated with the East/West divide. My units of analysis are online narratives and conversations related to topics and collective actions associated with Muslim women but also network linkages. In regard to the selection of content, I relied on Google authority to determine the most popular online narratives and conversations available in English. To interpret the content, I iteratively coded the data several times. I coded each dataset twice to include themes that became apparent toward the end of the first round of coding and then I recoded each set after I had finished coding all of them. In drawing conclusions, I discuss qualitative themes that I encountered in the datasets and provide evidence in textual forms. It is not uncommon in articles for researchers, myself included, to simply state that they conducted a qualitative content analysis; the prescription of Parker et al. (2011) is therefore useful perhaps.

This section provided a brief discussion of content analysis and some critiques of the method. In the next several subsections, I will expand upon the factors that Parker et al. (2011) suggest should be disclosed in relation to qualitative content analyses in more detail, starting with my objectives for undertaking this research project.

Feminist, Antiracist, Anti-Imperialist Research

In examining topics of import to and the collective actions of Muslim women through their online discussions, researchers could avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping and othering by putting the dialogues and collectives of Muslim women living in various contexts into conversation. For example, Muslim women from several countries around the world participated in dialogue about the artificial hymen so, while it is important to understand the context from which they are writing, context does not need to be the principal focus of the analysis—the topic is central. Notwithstanding the comments of some Westerners, the artificial hymen data implies that the importance of female virginity is not limited to the Arab world. It is universal. My research emphasizes that Muslimness assumes various shades in conjunction with context and personal adoption of beliefs, which is a dynamic that might be missed in regionally and nationally bound analyses and those limited to the content analyses of the websites of influential Islamic scholars. This variety creates both endogenously and exogenously rendered ruptures in Muslim communities, based on the perceived authenticity of the Islamic beliefs articulated by the different members who make up these subgroupings as well as the various observance of Islamic practices among Muslims. These typologies are neither necessarily intentional nor are they always self-ascribed—many Muslims prefer just to be Muslims—but the diversity of Islamic practices leads people inside and outside of Muslim communities to compartmentalize Muslims with various labels based on their observable practices. For instance, Muslim women who disagree with polygyny, who in this case were based in Bahrain and the United Kingdom, may be labeled as “liberal Muslims,” (see Chapter 4), which challenges the proposition that “liberal” Islam is

housed in the West because some women from the Gulf region discredited the legitimacy of polygyny as well.

Part of the thrust of this research is the disrupt boundaries between the East and the West; therefore, concentrating on one identity, “Muslim women”—despite the significant variations in cultures, practices, and beliefs—and topics of interest and forms of collective action allowed me to analyze parallels in the experiences of Muslim women regardless of context. For example, Muslim women in the West are often bullied in public spaces for marking themselves as Muslims, while women in the Arab world are bullied to reinforce male dominance over the public sphere and the women are often blamed for the harassment for not complying with “traditional” social norms related to dress. In both cases, women are subjected to harassment for non-conformity with the dominant culture. Their responses to the bullying, however, may be quite distinct (see Chapter 4 and 6). In an effort to advance feminist, antiracist, and anti-imperialist (Mohanty, 2003) research, I focus on topics and collective actions rather than contexts, being that the focus on contexts sometimes reinforces the East/West binary. Furthermore, in an attempt to frustrate regionally bound stereotypes of women, I employ qualitative content analyses toward privileging the voices of Muslim women, which is consistent with standpoint epistemologies (Harding, 2002).

This subsection has briefly outlined some of my biases as a researcher. The next subsection will frame the units of analysis of my qualitative content analyses that are distinct from the units of analysis of the overall connective content analysis—the ten datasets.

Unit of Analysis

The units of analysis were the content of links based on keyword search results on Google, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *YouTube*. For topical and collective action networks, I began with search queries on Google to determine the most linked to webpages. I used Google because it is the most popular search engine (Earl, 2006; Garrett, 2005; Hindman et al., 2003) and it tends to favor social media links (Kirchhoff et al., 2007), which are of principal importance to this research. However, since the Google algorithm relies on word tagging among other factors, some of the results were links to conventional and online news sites (Su et al., 2010). I looked at the top 100 results on Google which is inline with other studies that used as little as ten results to devise thematic codes for the topical content analysis of websites (Carpenter & Jose, 2012) or as many as 1,000 to analyze websites related to online collective action tactics (Earl, 2006). I also included links up to the third degree from the original search results, similar to Hindman et al. (2003). In extracting data from the internet, I noted the date of the data collection because ranking algorithms result in the constantly changing authority of the associated links. I stored the data from these searches offline to preserve the initial ranking. I also executed the same topical keyword searches on *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and *YouTube*, which I will discuss more in the next subsection.

Selection of Content

I collected data for the top 100 Google results as well as links within those results up to the third degree. I did not discriminate between the links based on the keyword searches results but I favored the content written by Muslim women and the data from social media platforms in my write-up of the research. I will discuss timelines for the data

collections in “Datasets” section. I wanted to reproduce the everyday surfing experience of someone who was searching for these topics online, for which Huberman et al. (1998) created a formal model (also see Hindman et al., 2003).

I performed keyword searches on Google as well as the aforementioned social media platforms. The keyword searches were relatively straightforward in relation to the collective actions (“HarassMap,” “Pink Hijab Day,” “NiqaBitch,” “SlutWalk Morocco,” and so forth) and some of the topics (“Muslim lesbians,” “hijab discrimination,” and “artificial hymen”), but it was a more convoluted endeavor for the social phenomenon that I attempted to conceptualize, techno-ikhtilat. The “Muslim spinster” keyword search was also more complicated because, although I was interested in collecting data on the collective action related to destigmatizing spinsterhood in Egypt (the campaign that was initially linked to in the artificial hymen data), the keyword search tended to focus on links related to the Muslim spinsterhood in the West. In the case of the hijabi fashion network, I used the top Google results and links on the resulting blogs but I only included the blogs that had at least 100 followers to establish a baseline of authority. Although the hijabi fashion dataset is an outlier because it is related to a homogeneous network, I included it in the dissertation to illustrate the differences between Muslim-oriented networks and transnational networks related to religious practices, collective actions, and topics of import.

Analyzing Content

I coded each dataset at least three times. I initially coded each dataset twice to code for themes that presented themselves toward the midpoint of the dataset. After I had double-coded each dataset, I recoded each one to include the network overlaps between

the datasets, including themes, social media users, topics, and content. I have included the codebook for HarassMap (see Appendix A) to provide an example of the themes that I inductively developed in the data analysis. I coded passages for multiple themes, as the excerpts below demonstrate:

women in Egypt have been harassed (verbally and physically) since they were little girls in school uniforms. i have been harassed when i was 11, been harassed by police officers and harassed wearing jeans & wearing a 3abaya in Ramadan alike, often when i am with my own mother who is a lady that in theory should be respected at least for her age. the problem is that it is sadly accepted as the norm.¹⁰ (alex girl) [t: norm, t: kid t: police, t: intervention t: myth t: sacred t: Ramadan t: age]

What is really sickening is when these people use religion to back up their arguments, using the part of it which orders people to dress modestly and completely ignoring the one which preaches looking away from others whatever their type of dress may be. This, of course, is a hideous double standard that a significant percentage of our culture portrays today, and that forces young women to dress a certain way not because of their faith, but in order to guarantee their security (which even then isn't 100% guaranteed), completely undermining the essence of religion.¹¹ [t: religion, t: veil t: myth t: victim-blame t: self-control t: gaze t: modesty t: double standards t: intervention]

I applied many of the same themes in the HarassMap dataset to the SlutWalk Morocco dataset, although these collective actions are strongly linked in purpose and somewhat in context. Some of the themes, such as “double standards,” which I coded for in the quote above, and many others were laced throughout many of the datasets: for example, the issue of double standards was also prevalent in the datasets associated with artificial hymens and techno-ikhtilat (see Chapter 4). I conceptualize these themes, the ones that I encounter in many of the datasets, as “pervasive themes.” For instance, all the datasets included the “pervasive theme” of “silence”; that is, Muslim women are not expected to stand up for themselves and/or they are subjected to forced silences/confinements/disappearances, which I will discuss further in Chapter 3. All of the datasets tied the piety of Muslim women to their various religious practices: for

¹⁰ <http://diaryofadeskgirl.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/im-an-egyptian-woman-and-i-like-being-sexually-harrassed/>

¹¹ <http://namelessbabble.blogspot.com/2011/06/sexual-harassment-in-egypt.html>

example, veiling, which I will discuss in Chapter 5, and chastity and motherhood, which I will broach in Chapter 4. I also encountered “parallel themes,” such as the “myths” related to sexual harassment (for example, women who dress appropriately will not be subjected to sexually harassment) and “myths” or stereotypes related to spinsters (for example, if a beautiful, independent woman is not married by time she is 25, she must have loose morals). Another parallel theme is online and offline bullying: offline, through harassment on the streets, such as the sexual harassment of women (Chapter 4) and verbal and physical violence against hijabis (Chapter 5 and 6); and online, through trolling social media sites related to LGBTQ Muslims (Chapter 5), for example, and the social policing of the online behaviors of Muslim women (Chapter 4). In devising the chapters, I attempted to organize them based on pervasive themes and in putting the various datasets into conversation I drew upon parallel themes, although the influences of networks also informed the write-up of the data.

Drawing Conclusions

I offer as much textual proof as possible to substantiate the conclusions I make in the chapters that follow but, as mentioned above, I realize texts are polysemic so other people could draw different conclusions with these same texts. I flesh out my conclusions through pervasive and parallel themes, described in the previous subsection, as well as through network underpinnings. The conclusions are principally data-driven but I ground them in literature whenever possible. I also base my conclusions, particularly the disruption of the East-West dichotomy, on network linkages between social media users, content, topics, and collective actions, but there is not enough space here to systematically outline all of the network overlaps. I do point out the overlaps when it is

particularly relevant to the discussions in the subsequent chapters and I will also provide a brief discussion of them in the next section.

This section has discussed some important elements of content analysis, which I have outlined to demonstrate how I have dealt with each one. The next section will outline the connective content analysis methodology.

Connective Content Analysis

Although I consider myself an online ethnographer, my methodology for this research were somewhat distinct from what I have done in the past (see Robinson and Parmentier, forthcoming). What started as the first of a multiple-methods research design, which would have included in-depth interviews and participant observation, was stalled in the first stage, qualitative content analysis, when I got lost in overlapping networks. I began collecting data for mini-projects related to online collective actions of and topics of interest to Muslim women, which were online/offline media events that I discovered through the blog postings of transnational networks of Muslim women. During my preliminary analyses of the datasets, I found significant consistencies in the qualitative themes and overlaps in the datasets that presented richer narratives when I put them into conversation with each other. By overlaps, I am referring to similar discussions and topics in multiple datasets and contributions by many of the same social media users.

While the data were initially collected to elucidate various disparate phenomena, they were qualitatively coded with consistent themes, which I used to flesh out the pervasive and parallel themes that demonstrated some analogous experiences and concerns among Muslim women regardless of context. Due the overlaps of users, topics, and content, I began to think of the overall project as a “connective content analysis”

because, while I extracted data as separate datasets, part of my third round of coding involved network linkages, including social media users and content that I found in multiple datasets. Although I initially intended to move to the next method of the larger online ethnography project, I stopped collecting data at this point to reflect on the thousands pages of text that I had already gathered and coded, which is what I have analyzed in the chapters to follow. The other two methods, participant observation and in-depth interviews, will be employed in future works to triangulate the findings of this connective content analysis.

To situate how I iteratively discovered the topics and collective actions included in this research, I should start at the beginning of my data collection. In 2009, I created a seed list of bloggers for a NSF grant proposal that included 150 female, Muslim bloggers from 17 different countries who blogged in English. During this time, I discovered hijabi fashion blogging through Malaysian networks, although many of the blogs were in Malay so I decided to conduct research on this movement in the United States. In the data associated with hijabi fashion blogging, I found discussions about hijab discrimination, Pink Hijab Day, and NiqaBitch as well as a reference to Muslim lesbianism. Similarly, I discovered discussions about the artificial hymen from one of the seed list bloggers, Zeinobia, blogging at *Egyptian Chronicles*; one of the links in this dataset was related spinsterhood and another broached sexual harassment in Egypt through which I discovered HarassMap. Through HarassMap, I discovered discussions about Muslim lesbians. Furthermore, some of the overlapping content of the artificial hymen and hijab discrimination datasets, led to the conceptualization of techno-ikhtilat, or online gender mixing, which is sometimes considered appropriate in contexts in which gender

segregation is enforced socially and/or legally offline. SlutWalk Morocco, although it often shares content from the HarassMap *Facebook* page, is the only collective action that did not link to at least one other datasets.

In the various datasets, I encountered many bloggers that I identified for the NSF proposal seed list; thus many of these women appear to be active participants in various online networks, including social media and/or online news outlets, and concerned with both local and global issues affecting women. These are some of the same bloggers whom I originally identified as “bridge bloggers” but I shifted away from focusing on this type of analysis because it would have mainly focused on topics and conversations targeted at non-Arabs and/or non-Muslims, when discussions about Muslimness and the concerns of Muslim women appeared richer and more intriguing. “Bridge blogging” typically entails reaching out to dissimilar people (Zuckerman, 2008) but there are enough differences within the folds of those who consider themselves to be Muslims. I also originally assumed, due to my extensive research on the Moroccan blogosphere, that bloggers from the Arab region who choose to blog in English were likely reaching out to others outside of the region, although more recent literature has suggested that English is one of the preferred languages of Muslim bloggers in the Arab world and the West (Bunt, 2009a; 2009b; Etling et al., 2009), especially among women (Dubai School of Government, 2011). Analyzing vernacular cosmopolitan praxis in transnational networks erects more conversational bridges and presents more opportunities to understand the concerns of Muslim women than conversations between the rhetorical “West” and “East,” which often dissolve into Islamophobic trolling and defensive Muslim postures. Thus these transnational networks in conjunction with topics of interest to Muslim women and

their collective actions facilitate dialogue between Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims while offering opportunities to identify cosmopolitan praxis rather than trolling and hate speech. Focusing on the topics that Muslim women discuss and their collective actions fosters understanding of their concerns and how they frame issues related to women's rights through their lived experiences.

This section has discussed connective content analysis, which is equally concerned with content and bridging mechanisms between various network clusters because these overlaps create interesting spaces to explore the data from various viewpoints that would not be apparent in disparate content analyses. The next section will discuss ethical considerations in conducting online research.

Ethical Considerations

In regard to ethic issues related to conducting online research, including confidentiality, informed consent, and the public/private nature of online content, I have treated the textual material that I gleaned from the internet as public information, although there is not universal agreement on whether or not digital materials should be approached in this manner. One perspective on the issues of privacy and informed consent in relation to internet research is that all information on the internet is public because the technology is public by its very nature (Pittenger, 2003). This perspective, however, ignores the possibility that certain forums are open to all people but, within some of these spaces, there is an implicit understanding that the privacy and anonymity of interlocutors will be respected: for example, dependency and abuse survivor support groups. I treat this textual material as public because there does not appear to be any assumption that social media and online news content are private arenas; in other words,

there is no “perceived privacy” (King 1996 as cited in Berry, 2004, p. 326) associated with the content. I do consider discussions over private listservs, password-protected blogs, and personal emails (which divulge identities) as private materials that would require informed consent to include in publications.

I have included internet dialogue that is accessible to the public because seeking informed consent, especially from the commenters, considering their already anonymized identities, would have been unrealistic. Furthermore, I have denoted the identities of interlocutors as they are posted on social media platforms in an effort to respect the level of anonymity that users have established online. Although I have explained the perceived publicness of the content I have used in this analysis, the problematic of “harvesting” remains. Harvesting is defined as extracting data from the web for uses other than for which it was intended (Bakardjieva & Feenberg, 2001 as cited in Berry, 2004, p. 327). One of the purposes of interaction in social media is to create dialogue among dissimilar people and to share narratives about one’s lived experiences, therefore, I believe that the benefits of using these public text to challenge widely held beliefs outweigh the risk of harvesting materials that were not perhaps posted on social media to be used in research.

I have discussed why I think using public content from online spaces is acceptable despite conflicting perspectives on the subject. I now turn to how I collected data for each dataset as well as major events associated with the topics and collective actions that contributed to the social media events.

Datasets

The following subsections will discuss the principal online events associated with each dataset and any particularities related to the data collection.

Global Hijabi Fashion Network

I collected this data in August of 2011. Hijabi fashion blogging is a transnational network comprised of bloggers who design modest outfits that comply with their understandings of the Islamic dress code. They come together to share fashion tips and designs and, in the American context, to iteratively configure the personal and collective identity of American hijabis and to engage in community building, including positioning themselves as role models for the next generation of Muslim women. In some ways, the bloggers function as an online community (for example, one hijabi organizes a bi-annual “Hijab Fashion Week”) but, in other ways, their postings suggest that they are part of an activist network because many of their postings and comments highlight the solidarity of hijabis amidst the failures of multiculturalism. They discuss discrimination they have faced and they link to cases in the conventional media of discrimination against Muslims worldwide to simultaneously configure a community of support and a network of activism. During the timeframe for which I collected data, there were also several discussions related to conventional media coverage of the hijabi fashion movement and “sharia-related industries” and consumerism, which is a \$96 billion market worldwide¹² (see Gökariskel & McLarney, 2010).

Mariam Sobh, the creator of *HijabTrendz*, claims that hers was the first American hijabi fashion blog, which she founded in 2007. There are relatively few in the American blogosphere but they contribute to the global network, which is most pervasive in Indonesia and Malaysia. I initially found the blogs that I included through a Google search of “hijabi fashion blog” and “United States” or “American.” I then followed links

¹² <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/04/uk-islamic-fashion-idUKLNE71305V20110204>

on the blog rolls of the initial bloggers that I discovered through the Google search and links to their “followers” to the third degree. I included the blogs postings from American hijabi fashion bloggers that had at least 100 followers and/or evidence of regular readership through commentary from July of 2009 to August of 2011.

Hijab Discrimination

I collected data for the hijab discrimination in January of 2012. At the time, there were several references to the growing number of reported cases of discrimination against Muslims in the United States in general, and against hijabis in particular, much higher than the number reported in the years following 9/11. I was attempting to discover if there was any evidence of organized Muslim boycotts of corporations that were linked to discriminatory practices against hijabis but I was unable to find any. This was just after the debacle of Lowe’s pulling its advertisements from the “All-American Muslim” television show, in which case there was evidence of organized boycotts of the corporation by American Muslims. The time period of the data collection followed the French niqab ban coming into effect so there were several references to this legislation. There were also articles related to Islamophobia among and the discriminatory practices of government agencies, courts, law enforcement, and educational administrators.

Aside from the initial Google search of “hijab discrimination,” I collected data from the aforementioned social media platforms using the same search term. My analysis of the data focused on the American context because the NiqaBitch dataset covered the topic in the other major hot spot of discrimination against veiled Muslim women: France. I found the discussion about El-Sherbini (see Chapter 3) on a *Facebook* page related to this query as well as discussions about discrimination against hijabis in North Africa,

which are consistent with discussions related to hijab discrimination in this region that I encountered on the hijabi fashion blogs. I analyzed dozens of related videos on *YouTube*. Since I relied on Google ranking, I did not set a specific time period for the relevant content that I included as I did for the data collection related to the hijabi fashion blogs.

Much of the data that I collected was related to the two highly publicized cases of hijab discrimination related to Boudlal's complaint against Disney and Khan's against Abercrombie and Fitch (Hollister and Co.), which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. I examined half of the 981 and 890 comments on the *Los Angeles Times* and *Huffington Post*, respectively, to ascertain politically center-right and center-left American perspectives on the "Boudlal v. Disney" and "Khan v. A&F" discrimination cases. I randomly selected comment pages.

Pink Hijab Day

Pink Hijab Day (PHD), an initiative that was created by a high school student from Missouri and became a national event in 2007 when it sought organizational support from the Susan G. Koman Foundation, was launched globally in 2008 with the objective of "shattering stereotypes" and spreading breast cancer awareness. PHD became an annual event observed on the last Wednesday in October in which participants wear a pink hijab to demonstrate their support for the campaign. It was rumored to have spread to ten different countries, including four in the MENA region. In 2011, the movement changed its purpose along with its website from "shattering stereotypes" to promoting dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims about the hijab. According to the new website, the movement sustained a following in a few countries in 2011, South Africa, Bulgaria, and Canada, but there was no mention of events in the MENA region.

I collected the data for this online/offline social movement in March of 2012. Much of the data in social media were narratives of people who participated in a PHD event and parallel initiatives, such as “Wear Hijab for a Day” events organized by Muslim Student Associations across the United States. The data collection for PHD in Arab countries was a bit complicated because I found little evidence to support the proposition that the campaign had travelled to this region. I collected as much data as I could from online sources and the campaigns that were linked to PHD in social media and on the old PHD website before I contacted a representative of the American PHD movement to find out why the organizations in Arab countries had discontinued their participation. Although she did not mention any specific organizations with the exception of TPQ (Think Pink Qatar), the representative told me in our email exchange that some of the organizations that were listed on the old PHD website were not partners of the movement but ones that the campaign had identified to encourage people to donate to local breast cancer foundations.

However, affiliates of the American PHD campaign were interviewed in a piece that ran in the *Missourian* in 2009 that claimed that Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE were participating and there was not any clarification that I could find to suggest the American PHD campaign had attempted to thwart rumors that Arab breast cancer organizations were participating, here,¹³ for example, which was written in 2010 and included Morocco as one of the participating countries, and, here (2009),¹⁴ which included Lebanon, as well as here¹⁵ and here,¹⁶ which claimed that the UAE was still

¹³ <http://www.chezchiara.com/2010/10/october-27-2010-global-pink-hijab-day.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.examiner.com/muslim-in-baltimore/global-pink-hijab-day-october-28th-not-just-for-muslims>

¹⁵ <http://www.ameinfo.com/247763.html>

participating as of 2011. I had been strung along by the odd mention of PHD in online news articles related to the event in the UAE,¹⁷ but I realized that I had based this micro-project on misinformation and rumor. Other researchers were similarly confused by online information about the PHD campaign, including Sobani et al. (2011) who claimed that the initiative was a success in Middle Eastern countries. Although Qatar sponsors a similar event and Egypt participated in 2008, the organizations in the UAE and the KSA have never participated. I had sent emails to the Arab breast cancer organizations to find out more information about their mediation of PHD before contacting the American representative. After hearing back from the American campaign representative it made sense why the Breast Cancer Foundation of Egypt (BCFE) representative had asked for links suggesting that it was still participating in PHD in 2009 and why the Emirati Simply Check representative explained to me that the movement started in Missouri and its purpose was to counter stereotypes. Since I had already gathered data on breast cancer organizations in the MENA region, I decided to analyze how they promoted breast cancer awareness locally and why PHD had not gained a significant following in the region.

Following the initial Google search of “Pink Hijab Day,” I examined the top 100 Google results related to “Pink Hijab Day” in each of the Arab countries and to PHD and each of the Arab breast cancer organizations. To understand local breast cancer awareness in the Arab world, I examined the Arab breast cancer websites that were linked to the old PHD website including the following: Breast Cancer Foundation of

¹⁶http://www.khaleejtimes.com/Displayarticle09.asp?section=todaysfeatures&xfile=data/todaysfeatures/2011/October/todaysfeatures_October51.xml

¹⁷ <http://beduoinprincess.blogspot.com/2008/10/pink-hijab-day-report.html>
http://www.khaleejtimes.com/Displayarticle09.asp?section=todaysfeatures&xfile=data/todaysfeatures/2011/October/todaysfeatures_October51.xml
<http://www.ameinfo.com/247763.html>

Egypt (BCFE), Think Pink Qatar (TPQ), and the Zahra Breast Cancer Association of the KSA.¹⁸ Since both PHD and Simply Check were linked to the Susan G. Komen Foundation and the Global Initiative (SGKGI), I examined Simply Check for the UAE. I also contacted representatives from the organizations through email, requesting information about their involvement in PHD and other breast cancer initiatives. I collected relevant materials from *YouTube* and *Facebook* as well based on the same keyword searches.

Artificial Hymen

Discussions about the artificial hymen in social media were principally related to the demands advanced by Egyptian religious and governmental authorities to ban the product. The controversy came to a head in August of 2009, when Radio Netherlands translated an advertisement for the artificial hymen from Chinese to Arabic and aired it in Egypt, which spread false information about the widespread use of the artificial hymen in the Arab world and implied that the product was primarily designed for and marketed to Arab women while it had actually been available in Asia since 1993. The Egyptian correspondent for Radio Netherlands, Amira Al Tahawi, was fired when she published a blog posting related to the misinformation disseminated by the radio station. Al Tahawi had earlier tried to convince Radio Netherlands to retract the claims made in the advertisement but her superiors ignored her requests.¹⁹ Egyptian governmental and religious authorities began calling for the ban of the product in October of 2009, which one male blogger,²⁰ Mohammed Al Rahhal, says backfired by creating a buzz in Egyptian

¹⁸ <http://welovehijab.com/2009/10/07/global-pink-hijab-day/>

¹⁹ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/02/12/egypt-blogger-loses-job-for-uncovering-fake-virginity-story/>

²⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/oct/28/artificial-hymen>

conventional and social media about the artificial hymen. Al Rahhal added to the controversy by purchasing the item through the internet and posting pictures of it online. Social media in the West picked up the controversy, not related to the fake hymen itself, but to the attempts to ban it in Egypt. Many of the links and comments in Western social media tended to reinforce the prejudices articulated by Radio Netherlands; that is, the product was mainly invented to save Muslim/Arab women from honor killings. Some Muslim women expressed their distain, not only because lawmakers were considering banning the artificial hymen to protect women from themselves (see Chapter 4), but also because Westerners were suggesting that the invention was mainly created for them, despite the odd suggestion in Western social media networks that the product is principally marketed in the West as a sex toy. One reporter tried out the “Joan of Arc” version of the artificial hymen and described the copious amounts of “cherry Kool-aid” that it produced could not be considered a realistic rendition of a woman’s deflowering,²¹ which supports the rare assertions that it is intended as a sex toy. However, some brands, like the one that contributed to the Egyptian controversy,²² do market the product as a realistic prop to use to “marry with confidence”²³ while guarding one’s “dark secret.”²⁴

I collected data on the artificial hymen in September of 2012 from the top 100 search results on Google and the comments and links associated with these results. Some of the related content discussed in the links included the following: hymen reconstruction, or hymenoplasty; virgin prostitutes; anatomical issues related to the failure of the hymen to rupture; the universal obsession with virginity, which is not limited to the Arab world;

²¹ <http://nymag.com/thecut/2012/09/sex-with-a-fake-hymen.html>

²² <http://www.afrik-news.com/article16896.html>

²³ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/18/artificial-hymens-kits-restore-virginity_n_1894372.html

²⁴ <http://www.groundreport.com/World/Will-Egypt-import-Chinese-Hymens/2908960>

alternative forms of sexual relations (anal and oral) that have become popular in certain contexts to preserve the hymen; discussions related to various conceptualizations of virginity, typically rendered as the presence/absence of the hymen or to penal-vaginal penetration; and the dangers associated with using the artificial hymen.

HarassMap

In late 2009, Rebecca Chiao and Engy Ghozlan first came up with the idea for HarassMap, an initiative to crowdsource information about the incidence of sexual harassment on the streets of Cairo. They did not launch the initiative until December 2010 because it took a year to develop the technology, a Ushahidi platform matched with Frontline SMS reporting capabilities. The launch of the campaign coincided with the release of the film “678,”²⁵ which highlights the daily harassment of women in Egypt. The point of the initiative was to not only gather information about harassment but also to use this information to organize volunteers in “hotspots” located on the map to spread community awareness about the problem toward “ending the social acceptability” of it. The campaign has had more success with the more than 500 community volunteers than it has with the map²⁶; reporting of sexual harassment on the map has been limited, considering that many Egyptian bloggers frame harassment as a daily occurrence.²⁷ HarassMap has co-sponsored successful online events, such as the “End Sexual Harassment” campaign, which encouraged social media users to write about sexual harassment on June 20, 2011. Over 150 people from four different countries participated in the online initiative. I did not include this online campaign as a separate dataset

²⁵ <http://harassmap.org/en/who-we-are/how-and-why-we-began/>

²⁶ <http://www.youthaward.org/winners/harassmap>

²⁷ As of March 2014, there were nearly 1,100 incidents reported on the map.

because HarassMap posted the associated links on its blog but many of the personal narratives connected to HarassMap overlap with this online campaign. Organizations in 28 different countries have requested advice from HarassMap on how to implement their own version of the technology, including Libya, Turkey, South Africa, US, Canada, Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Cambodia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Kenya, Sudan, UK, and activists in several other countries, like Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Syria, India, and Algeria, have already launched HarassMap-modeled platforms, demonstrating the universality of the issue and the innovativeness of the campaign and technology.²⁸

Egypt has seen a surge in the incidence of harassment in the last several decades. HarassMap representatives and social media interlocutors have claimed that women in general dressed less modestly in the 1960s and the 1970s but harassment was less common because there were social mechanisms in place to protect women on the streets. For example, Chiao states that Egyptians will still joke that a man with a shaved head must have been harassing a woman because it is rumored that in earlier decades local men would shave the heads of harassers.²⁹ Notwithstanding Suzanne Mubarak's,³⁰ a self-proclaimed spokesperson for women's rights under the Mubarak regime,³¹ denial of the issue, sexual harassment has been covered in conventional media since the mid-2000s. A few media events were particularly important in drawing attention to the epidemic incidence of harassment in Egypt: during the Eid festivities of 2006, groups of men in

²⁸ <http://harassmap.org/en/what-we-do/around-the-world/>

²⁹ <http://blog.harassmap.org/2010/10/making-harassment-unacceptable/>

³⁰ <http://www.fastcompany.com/1698251/harassmap-asks-egyptian-women-plot-points-sexist-behavior-sms>
<http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/2011/05/lara-logan-speaks-out-will-egyptian.html>

³¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/10/25/harass-map-aims-to-curb-l_n_773488.html

downtown Cairo would gang harass any woman they saw on the streets, forcing women to stay in their homes to protect themselves.³² Gang harassment has since become an expected feature of the celebration³³ but, in 2006, many of the incidents were videoed and uploaded to *YouTube* precluding any attempts by officials to deny the gendered violence in the streets; and, in 2008, Noha Rushdie (also referred to as Noha al-Ostaz) dragged the man who had groped her from his car into the police station, demanding that he be charged with harassment, which turned her into a national heroine.³⁴ Her story was reenacted in the award-winning film, “678,”³⁵ mentioned above.

I collected data on HarassMap in October of 2012. Many Egyptian female social media users were discouraged that the détente on street harassment that occurred during the revolution ended shortly thereafter. On International Women Day, March 8, 2011, crowds of men attacked a group of female protesters. Furthermore, military abuses in December 2011 and January 2012, such as virginity tests and the incarceration and torture of Mona Eltahawy, were highlighted in the data. In addition to the top 100 Google search results, I collected data from the HarassMap blog, including the social media postings of people involved in the online “End Sexual Harassment” campaign that were also posted on Twitter. Since the HarassMap *Facebook* page is primarily updated in Arabic and the Twitter page is mainly written in English, I gathered tweets and the links from tweets for a period of six months between June 2011 and January 2012. I also

³² <http://bikyamasr.com/49628/timeline-of-sexual-attacks-in-egypt-and-action-to-combat/>
<http://bikyamasr.com/21372/egypt-reports-massive-sexual-harassment-during-holiday/>
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/10/25/harass-map-aims-to-curb-l_n_773488.html
<http://www.npr.org/2011/02/17/133845499/women-hope-harassment-will-end-in-new-egypt>

³³ <http://sarah-lessons.blogspot.com/2011/06/sick-society.html>

³⁴ <http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/2011/05/lara-logan-speaks-out-will-egyptian.html>
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/10/25/harass-map-aims-to-curb-l_n_773488.html

³⁵ <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1032/cu4.htm>
<http://cmfilmcommentary.com/2013/10/04/mohamed-diab-sffs/>

analyzed the film “678,” due to its strong connections with the HarassMap campaign, which featured fictionalized narratives of Egyptian women’s daily experiences with sexual harassment.

Techno-Ikhtilat

Since techno-ikhtilat is my own concept, it was somewhat difficult to configure search terms that spoke to the phenomenon I was attempting to elucidate, but some of the most appropriate ones that I used for the initial Google searches were “online gender mixing” and “gender segregation on the internet,” and “cyberveil” and “cyber-hijab” (Sevea, 2007), as the dynamic was coined elsewhere.³⁶ The word *ikhtilat* is Arabic for appropriate gender mixing, for example, at a wedding, in contrast to *khulwa*, which denotes inappropriate gender mixing, such as an unmarried man and woman being alone together. I was not only interested in interrogating whether or not women were using the internet for the purpose of remaining invisible, because it appeared that they were, but also what they were doing in cyberspaces while they were physically invisible. The concept iteratively developed through my analysis of the hijab discrimination, artificial hymen, and HarassMap datasets. On the HarassMap *Facebook* page, for example, I found an interesting article about women using technology for social change in which one activist, Mallika Dutt, says,

For women who have severe restrictions on their mobility, this allows them to step out into the world in a whole new way... We can’t underestimate the profound power and engagement that social media allows women who have historically had to really fight to be heard.³⁷

This gave me pause to consider how mobility restrictions, in order to ensure their safety, affect hijabis in the United States. Based on the comments made by some non-Muslim

³⁶ <http://www.islamicvoice.com/2001-05/women.htm>

³⁷ <http://www.more.com/social-media-activism>

Americans who felt personally violated by the public display of this religious symbol, the hijab, and the propensity of hijabis to work from home, “backstage,” or among people who are less likely to find the hijab offensive (see Chapter 6), I began to wonder if some Muslim women were using the internet to interact with others or work or go to school, while remaining invisible in the physical public spheres in other contexts as well.

The artificial hymen data presented some ways that Muslim women were engaging in *techno-ikhtilat* but also in *techno-khulwa*. In an article by Mona Eltahawy, she discusses the sad existence of “Faiza X,” a Moroccan niqabi in France, who was denied citizenship because she “lives in “total submission” to the men in her family...leaving the house only to walk with her children or visit relatives.”³⁸ However, what if Faiza X was obtaining her Masters degree online or working as a rape crisis counselor from her home? Would this change her perceived unworthiness to be French? I would argue that it probably would not but the internet now offers these opportunities to women who remain isolated from physical public spheres. Another piece by Marwa Rakha about her journey through an online dating site suggested that some Egyptian women are using social media to find romance, including certain varieties that might be difficult to encounter in the conventional dating scene, that is, among Egyptians who date. Some were willing to exchange “their services” for money or food. Others were looking for other lesbians and/or threesomes. Some were divorcées who were interested in having relationships but did not want to remarry.³⁹ My curiosity with *techno-ikhtilat* was also reinforced by some Westerners who believed that, if a woman had to purchase a hymen over the internet to avoid the embarrassment or worse of not bleeding on her wedding

³⁸ <http://www.monaeltahawy.com/blog/?p=62>

³⁹ http://marwarakha.newsvine.com/_news/2007/09/27/988123-back-from-the-adult-dating-world

night, she would not have computer access to begin with, ostensibly because Arabs continue to live in tents and ride camels.⁴⁰

I collected data for *techno-ikhtilat* through Google searches in October of 2012 based on the queries above. Some of the initial results were related to Muslims encouraging gender segregation online and guidelines for appropriate interaction between men and women online,⁴¹ which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, and offline gender segregation.⁴² Similar to the links in the artificial hymen data, I found some articles about *techno-ikhtilat* (internet use for educational purposes, medical advice, to maintain connections with friends, to become acquainted with prospective husbands, to work from home,⁴³ and “halal dating”⁴⁴) and others about *techno-khulwa* (cyberstripping,⁴⁵ swapping nude photographs,⁴⁶ or engaging in “Sex in the City”-style dating⁴⁷). Some of the articles and social media postings were related to activism against offline gender segregation, such as the “pray-in” movement in American mosques in which women have demanded the option of being integrated into the same prayer section as men,⁴⁸ perhaps emphasizing the “gender segregation” component of the query without

⁴⁰ <http://www.popsoci.com/scitech/article/2009-10/artificial-hymen-makes-women-virgins-again>
<http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/08/29/saudi-arabia-independent-women/>

⁴¹ <http://www.ummah.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-54217.html>
<http://sisters.islamway.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=336>
<http://islamforsisters.wordpress.com/2011/01/09/the-communication-between-men-women-over-the-internet/#more-104>

⁴² <http://eshda3wa.blogspot.com/2008/02/anti-segregation-cool-vedio.html>
<http://www.zdistrict.com/2008/08/07/more-kuwait-segregation/>
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/aug/12/saudi-arabia-city-women-workers>
<http://susiesbigadventure.blogspot.com/2011/10/extreme-gender-segregation.html>
<http://www.chron.com/business/article/gender-segregation-s-reach-grows-in-saudi-arabia-1796193.php>

⁴³ <http://www.islamicvoice.com/2001-05/women.htm>

⁴⁴ http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_51_100/halal_dating.htm

⁴⁵ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzKlAPbmd_w

⁴⁶ <http://sisters.islamway.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=336>

⁴⁷ http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_51_100/halal_dating.htm

⁴⁸ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jehan-s-harney/can-mosque-pray-ins-chang_b_615313.html

the “internet” part. Yet even these unintended results suggest that gender segregation plays a role in the lives of Muslim women in various contexts to different extents. They also suggest that the different extents might inform gendered behavior online, which I will also discuss in Chapter 4.

NiqaBitch

NiqaBitch was a two-person online/offline protest involving two female French students and *YouTube*.⁴⁹ The two women had an accomplice video them walking around the streets of Paris in mini-skirts, stilettos, and niqabs, which they posted on *YouTube*. The protest took place in October 2010 just after the government had passed the ban on the niqab, although niqabis (and their families) would not be subjected to fines and/or the mandatory citizenship classes until April of 2011. The French government argued that the ban was an effort to save women from being forced to wear what they framed as a symbol of subjugation but women who staged the NiqaBitch protest did not believe that the government should be able to determine what women wear in public, which they consider a “civic freedom.” Interestingly, a few commenters highlighted that it was not socially acceptable for women to wear slacks in France until the 1970s, a norm that was underwritten by an archaic law that is still on the books,⁵⁰ thus it appears that France has a long history of deciding what is or is not appropriate for women to wear in public. Commenters expressed opposition to the protest both on “secular” and “religious” grounds. Secularists emphasized that NiqaBitch should celebrate the freedoms that women enjoy in secular France, including the freedom to engage in what they saw as a ridiculous protest, while some Muslim commenters believed that the protest was yet

⁴⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw32TU7uAi4&feature=player_embedded

⁵⁰ <http://www.rue89.com/2010/09/30/minishort-et-niqab-balade-provoc-dans-paris-avant-la-loi-168779>

another slightly veiled attempt to tarnish the image of Islam through an indecent spectacle. Some of the Muslim commenters principally took issue with the “bitch” part of the name because they believed the protest was implying that niqabis are whores.

Through my analysis of this dataset, I had intended to use it for a section or chapter on extremist secular viewpoints but I ran out of time and space, so I use this data sparingly to supplement other discussions (see Chapter 3, for example, and the introduction to Chapter 6).

I collected this data in September of 2012. The Google search results highlighted a few of the main links related to the protest: the *YouTube* video and articles that explain the protest in English and French in the *Guardian* and *Rue89*, from which I extracted comments. I also collected data for the protest on *Twitter* and *Facebook* but these pages did not attract as many comments as the aforementioned links. These three active internet sources, the *YouTube* video page and the *Rue89* and *Guardian* articles, resulted in over 400 pages of text, indicating that NiqaBitch was highly successful in generating dialogue and that small protests offline can become grandiose ones online due to the viral capacity of social media networks. Furthermore, since one social media user asked for permission to copy the NiqaBitch protest in Belgium and the *NiqaBitch* Facebook page linked to another NiqaBitch-style protest in the Netherland, the network-enhanced protest appears to have encouraged farther reaching effects than would typically be associated with a two-person campaign.

Muslim Spinster

The idea that the emancipation of women has contributed both to the increase in sexual harassment and to the number of spinsters in Egypt was highlighted in a few

pieces in the HarassMap and artificial hymen datasets, which led me to collect data on this social phenomenon as well. Although the issues of spinsterhood and sexual harassment appear disconnected, I will discuss why they may be related in Chapter 4. In 2008, Egyptian spinsters began speaking out through social media about their right not to be socially isolated due to their marital status. *Global Voices Online* showcased various links from where these anomalous women were speaking out.⁵¹ One woman's, Youmna Mokhtar, *Facebook* group, "Spinster*/Old Maids for Change," which was included in the *Global Voices Online* article, became a local and international media sensation in 2008, including *AFP* articles in both French and English and articles in the *Los Angeles Times* and *Lepetitjournal*.⁵² *Muslimah Media Watch* discussed the international coverage of Mokhtar's group and offered another article on the "problem" of spinsterhood in the Gulf,⁵³ which led me to expand my data collection beyond Egypt, although I discovered through links that spinsterhood is increasing throughout the Arab region and in Muslim communities in the West. Several of the links related to Egyptian spinsters, also highlighted a book that was published in 2008, "I Want to Get Married," which was a compilation of blog postings by another Egyptian woman, Ghada Abdel Aal. The book was quite successful in Egypt and was subsequently translated into English and published by the University of Texas Press⁵⁴ as well as by other publishers in other languages. Almost all of the articles related to the book discussed sexual harassment in Egypt, implying that there is some connection between the two issues but typically spinsterhood

⁵¹ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/12/20/egyptian-spinsters/>

⁵² <http://muslimahmediawatch.org/2008/12/18/egyptian-spinsters-and-old-maids-sitting-happily-on-the-shelf/>

⁵³ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mmw/2012/07/the-problem-of-spinsterhood-in-the-gulf/>

⁵⁴ <http://utpress.utexas.edu/index.php/books/abdiwp>

was highlighted as one of the causes of sexual harassment.⁵⁵ None of the articles on spinsterhood, however, suggested that Mokhtar's group might have been a reaction to the release of Abdel Aal's book, a book that suggests that women in Egypt will do almost anything to get married.

Many of the links and commenters in the dataset were attempting to elucidate the issue by establishing whom to blame for spinsterhood and, after the finger pointing, offering solutions. For example, one female Jordanian blogger published a posting, a creative writing piece, in which the fictitious unmarried female narrator complains about being blamed for not getting married although she never found the right man.⁵⁶ In response, a Jordanian male posted a rebuttal stating that he wanted to get married but his fiancée's family was so greedy that he eventually withdrew his proposal.⁵⁷ The male blogger's response alludes to some of the dominant discourse related to the spinsterhood "crisis," including the propositions that marriage is too expensive and that women and their families are demanding too much money from the prospective grooms. Several discussions were related to government-proposed solutions to the "crisis" and others were related to organic individual/community reactions⁵⁸ to the current uncertainties related to marriage in Muslim communities, including the increase in divorce rates⁵⁹ and the perceived lack of available men, all of which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 4.

⁵⁵ The coverage of sexual harassment in Egypt also suggests that campaigns like HarassMap have been successful in mediating this issue within and between localized and transnational networks to the extent that the epidemic is highlighted in conjunction with many separate but related issues covered in transnational news media related to Egypt.

⁵⁶ <http://thearabobserver.wordpress.com/2008/03/19/the-jordanian-spinster/>

⁵⁷ <http://blog.sweetestmemories.com/default.asp?Display=1286>

⁵⁸ Personal or localized community activism or resistance that is loosely connected to a larger network of activism will be discussed more in relation to PHD in Chapter 6.

⁵⁹ <http://lauraofarabia1000.blogspot.com/2010/07/spinsters-in-saudi-arabia-epidemic.html>
'Four million single women in Kingdom by 2015?'

I collected data for Muslim spinsters in February of 2013. Similar to the other datasets, I used Google to search for the query “Muslim spinster.” Many of the initial results were related to Muslim spinsterhood in Western countries, perhaps because I used the term “Muslim spinsters” and, at least in the case of Egypt, the online collective action related to spinsters was denoted by their nationality—Egyptian spinsters. Thus I also included the top 100 Google results for the queries “Egypt spinster” and “Arab spinster.”

Muslim Lesbians/LGBTQ Muslims

Although there were not any prominent events mentioned in this data collection, with the exception of the opening of a queer-friendly mosque in Paris by Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed in December of 2012,⁶⁰ there were some prominent figures associated with Muslim queerness. Irshad Manji was the most prominent figure in the dataset related to Muslim lesbians likely because she is one of the most well-known and controversial ones. Traditional Muslims often reference her as a “bad” sort of Muslim. Imam Daayiee Abdullah is also referenced quite often among traditional Muslims, perhaps because he is an imam who is outspokenly in favor of marriage equality. Scott Kugle, on the other hand, wrote and was mentioned in several pieces in the dataset but he is not often referenced as a “bad” Muslim in social media perhaps because he is not highly publicized in conventional media coverage. Kugle’s writings are typically consumed within academic circles and among people who are interested in Muslim queerness, while Manji’s, for example, are read and often celebrated by mainstream Americans and Western conventional media.

⁶⁰ <http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2012/12/frances-muslims>

Some of the conventional media coverage of Muslim lesbians highlighted radical changes in Muslim women's lifestyle when they embraced their queerness perhaps to emphasize the idea that Muslimness and queerness are incompatible identities and Muslim lesbians must choose between one or the other (us/them?). Queer Muslims, like the American hijabi fashion bloggers, often employ cyberspaces to forge queer Muslim identities or supportive networks, while others seek advice on coming out or staying in the closet or some combination of both; for example, some queer Muslims used online spaces to "virtually come out" or to solicit "marriages of convenience" with queer Muslims of the opposite sex so they could practice homosexuality in the closet and remain acceptable members of their Muslim communities.

Several queer Muslim organizations, like Al-Fatiha, and queer-tolerant Muslim organizations, such as Muslims for Progressive Values, were highlighted in the data. Some members of these groups claimed that it was necessary to form groups specifically catering to Muslim queers because the larger LGBTQ communities in the United States, for example, often reject them for being religious and/or people of color. Traditional Muslims used the same stomping grounds to express their emphatic rejection of the idea of being both queer and Muslim. Since I did not use any geographic qualifiers in my search queries, most of the data are related to queer Muslims in the West, which is related to the issue of the search being executed on a topical issue within the "dominant transnational connective memory" (see the Introduction and Chapters 3), although there were several contributions from social media users in non-Western countries. Some non-Western queer Muslim organization were mentioned in the data, like Helem in Lebanon, but some of the most vibrant contributions of non-Western queer Muslims came in the

form of films that showcased queerness in Muslim-majority countries. I viewed one of the most popular ones, “A Jihad for Love,” directed by Parvez Sharma.

In February of 2013, I collected the data based on the top 100 results on Google and associated links for the search queries “Muslim lesbian” and “LGBTQ Muslim.” These searches resulted in over 400 pages of text, demonstrating that this is an important topic for Muslims in the West and for the West in regard to Muslims.

SlutWalk Morocco/Woman Choufouch

Majdoline Lyazidi and Layla Belmahi created SlutWalk Morocco in August of 2011 to express solidarity with the global SlutWalk movement and to address street harassment in Morocco. They see harassment and rape as universal issues that require global solidarity. SlutWalk Morocco is undeterred by accusations that the movement suffers from cultural colonialism as an offshoot of a movement that was initiated in the West, particularly because several aspects of the local campaign make it both uniquely Moroccan and global at once. Focusing on sexual harassment, as the most pressing concern of women in the Moroccan society, was the first attempt to contextualize the movement in Morocco and changing the name to Woman Choufouch was the second, although I use the campaign titles interchangeably throughout this dissertation. The case study in Chapter 6 will discuss the differences between the original SlutWalk movement in Toronto and how it was locally contextualized in Morocco in more detail as well as how it has both benefitted and suffered from its connections to Western SlutWalk campaigns.

Unlike the Toronto movement that solicits its support from left-leaning, young feminists in Canada and North America as well as elsewhere, SlutWalk Morocco has

attempted to remain highly inclusive of various perspectives toward having a greater overall impact on Moroccan social perceptions. While SlutWalk Toronto is creating awareness of various spaces and institutions in which women are more vulnerable to rape, SlutWalk Morocco is addressing an issue that is both visible and pervasive so it does not have to convince its Moroccan supporters that street harassment is a problem as they can witness it for themselves daily. As a result, SlutWalk Morocco highlights various social norms and misconceptions that contribute to the pervasiveness of street harassment, including the following: “flirting” in the street is natural and women like it; women who show more skin want the “attention”; the issue of sexual harassment is exaggerated; only “sluts” get harassed; harassing “sluts” will convince them to comply with social and religious norms; women who do not like it will speak up against it (even though those who do are often stigmatized); and giving women more rights and women’s rights movements in general will lead to social and familial disintegration.

The organizers of the SlutWalk Morocco campaign were speaking to the Morocco public in general until 16 year-old Amina Filali’s suicide in March 2012 urged them to direct their activism toward the government and legal reform. The courts, with the complicity of her family, forced Filali to marry the man who raped her, which was consistent with Article 475 of the Moroccan penal code that allows rapists to escape punishment if they agree to marry the minors whom they rape. Over the next ten months, SlutWalk Morocco organized sit-ins, spread awareness about other court cases in which officials were attempting to invoke Article 475, and solicited its supporters to donate funds toward the production of a few films that highlighted the injustice of this law. The efforts of SlutWalk Morocco and other Moroccan human and women’s rights groups

were successful; in January of 2013, the Moroccan government agreed to reform the law. While the campaign against Article 475 appears to be focusing on a local issue, SlutWalk Morocco posted content about similar laws in Jordan and Lebanon and, upon further scrutiny, I learned the law is relevant to women's right in nearly 30 countries throughout the world.⁶¹ Due to the campaign's popularity, it has been recognized internationally, illustrated by Belmahi's invitation to speak about women's rights in Morocco at the Amnesty International Human Rights Festival in San Diego, California in 2013.

I collected data for SlutWalk Morocco in December of 2013. It was the only collective action that was not connected to the overlapping networks of the other datasets, though it did reference HarassMap fairly often. I discovered the SlutWalk Morocco movement while I was collecting data on the global SlutWalk movement for the aforementioned grant and, although I cannot connect it to the other datasets, I would argue that it shares enough in common with the other topics and collective actions to warrant inclusion in this thesis. The founders of the movement share the Muslim identity along with other various allegiances and their efforts strongly mirror the concerns that led to the initiation of the HarassMap campaign and other like initiatives throughout the world. I conducted the initial Google search related to "SlutWalk Morocco," which included links to the movement on various social media platforms. SlutWalk Morocco principally operates through *Facebook* and *Twitter* but, since most of the *Twitter* threads are in Arabic, I collected data from the *Facebook* posts that are predominantly in French. I included all of the content and comments on the SlutWalk Morocco *Facebook* page between August 2011 and March 2013. Although there are two *Facebook* pages

⁶¹ <http://www.womenundersiegeproject.org/blog/entry/from-morocco-to-denmark-rape-survivors-around-the-world-are-forced-to-marry>

associated with the SlutWalk Morocco movement with identical content, the SlutWalk Morocco and Woman Choufouch pages (at least since the inception of Woman Choufouch page in February of 2012), I included the content of the SlutWalk Morocco page because of its longer duration and its higher level of activity, denoted by the number of comments and “likes.”

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed my proposed “connective content analysis,” which is equally concerned with the topics of interest to/collective actions of Muslim women and with how these topics/collective actions are mapped out on concentric networks. It highlighted how I collected the data and my agenda as a researcher who strives for research that is feminist, antiracist, and anti-imperialist through attempting to transcend simple binaries, like the East and West, and exposing parallels related the lived experiences of Muslim women regardless of contexts. This chapter has also situated how my methods have attempted to avoid homogenous networks of Muslims and identity politics associated with typologies of Muslims through studying topics and collective actions to preserve the inherent diversity of the positionalities and worldviews associated with Muslims, while simultaneously attempting to disentangle cosmopolitanism from Western urban spaces and identities. Through my focus on topics of interest and collective actions related to women who subscribe to one common identity, despite various other allegiances, I have attempted to decenter the analysis from “East” and “West” and locate it in the alternative spaces that social media and overlapping networks provide.

The next chapter will illustrate some of the parallels in the lived experiences of Muslim women by focusing on their digital self-expressions and how they use social media to highlight the silenced voices of their martyred and disappeared sisters.

Chapter 3

Conversations in Cyberspace: Resisting Silence

The image of the “blue bra girl,”⁶² was seared into the international consciousness of social media users, emblematic of the struggle of the Egyptian people for dignity and rights. Few people knew her name or background but the image of her abused body and torn-open abaya was an introduction of the female body into popular resistance against the state that will not soon be forgotten. This image was initially disseminated by social media users and then picked up by international news outlets. In a sense, the unquestioned stereotype of “The Protester,” featured as the 2011 “Person of the Year” in *Time* magazine, which could more accurately be framed as “The Revolutionary,” is undermined by real-time examples of the lives of Muslim women captured in social media. In contrast to the sketch of the composed niqabi that was offered on the cover of *Time* to represent “The Protester,” free from the threat of imminent state-sponsored violence, the photos of the “blue bra girl” demonstrate the extent to which women have put their bodies in harm’s way to secure greater freedom for their society. Women’s bodies in protest are often symbols for gender equality but not symbols for revolutions—revolutionary symbols are often limited to the male body. Social media, however, have the ability to expand the collective imagination beyond what is available in conventional media, including reframing rhetoric related to the submissive, veiled Muslim woman.

Focusing on Arab women for the moment, miriam cooke (2000; 2001) argues that the multiple critique of Arab women involves the simultaneous rejection and cooptation of victimization. Says cooke (2000), “the effectiveness of their discourse is connected

⁶² <http://www.npr.org/blogs/pictureshow/2011/12/21/144098384/the-girl-in-the-blue-bra>

with Arab women's multiple representations as "victims" of transnational systems" (p. 160). The photos of the "blue bra girl" are an eloquent example of this victimization but, in this case, they reveal violence at the hands of the state rather than the typical reprisals against the victimization of Arab women at the hands of Arab men. Part of the conventional wisdom that has perpetuated their status as victims is their conspicuous absence and silence in power structures and conventional media, which have overpowered the odd rebuttal of the powerlessness of Arab women. There is a growing body of literature related Muslim women harnessing social media to speak in their own voices (Skalli, 2006; Mishra, 2007; Karolak, 2012), but the extent to which others, especially others outside of their immediate often nationally-qualified social media networks, are consuming the narratives of these women is still a matter of debate. Although this literature frames the experiences of Arab women, much of the same could be said in regard to Muslim women everywhere—they are silenced or stereotyped as silenced through the male dominance associated with Islam.

Through social media use, Muslim women are able to share their perspectives with others in cyberspaces and expand the digital archive to include their voices in the absence of alternative outlets. In other words, women use cyberspaces to counter their silenced voices in other public spaces and media. They offer countersentences related to their lived experiences whether or not others choose to read their writings. They may employ social media as passive soundboards, simply venting or sharing their feelings. Some Muslim women use social media outlets as their textual and multimedia implements for artistic expression. This chapter attempts to answer the broad question of how Muslim women are using social media to share their lived experiences toward

furthering their rights and countering silence. It focuses on some narratives of women who have been silenced by local constraints related to patriarchy and violence as well as by national and transnational ones related to the mediation of their narratives. It will frame their “digital self-expressions” (storytelling/narrative/art) and discuss the extent to which these expressions can expand the “networked” or “connective memory,” which is inherent to digital archives. The process through which narratives find their way into the dominant transnational connective memory is called mediation (Couldry, 2008; Livingstone, 2009) and, as I will demonstrate below, there are certain aspects of the narratives of Muslim women that facilitate their mediation into and within dominant transnational networks—the victimization tropes, for example—and other aspects that relegate them to localized or alternative digital archives.

Material Foundations of Storytelling in the Digital Age

As social media were learning to walk in the Web 2.0 period, many people registered for online journals or diaries that came out in the late-1990s: *LiveJournal*, created in 1999 (boyd & Ellison, 2007), is a popular example of this technology. Carolyn Burke is credited with introducing the first online diary in 1995.⁶³ Her diary and webpages of the same genre closely mirrored traditional diaries, featuring daily experiences, feelings, aspirations, and so forth. Rebecca Blood (2004) makes a distinction between online diaries and weblogs,⁶⁴ which developed a few years later, because weblogs linked to other weblogs with related content thereby encouraging connections between bloggers but the connectivity was limited as hyperlinks had not yet been

⁶³ <http://www.salon.com/1998/06/30/feature947645118/>

⁶⁴ <http://siti-server01.siti.disco.unimib.it/itislav/uploads/2007/11/how-blogging-software-reshapes-the-online-community.pdf>

developed at this point. In 1997, Jorn Barger, weblogging at *Robot Wisdom*, coined the term weblog to describe these pages that listed related weblogs. Online diaries, on the other hand, were personal accounts that did not necessarily attempt to connect to other web users.

As time progressed, weblogs became a combination of both of the previous uses of web technology. Blogs, as weblogs have come to be called, offer personal insight into the lives of those who share them with the ubiquity of cyberspace, similar to online diaries, but they also have the capability of fluidly linking likeminded people, mirroring the function of earlier weblogs. Later, other social media platforms, like *Facebook* that came online in 2006 (boyd & Ellison, 2007), became popular outlets for sharing one's personal life through photographs and shorter, pithier remarks than were the norm of blogs. Tweets chronicle interesting links, news stories, and personal accounts in even shorter, pithier texts. Blogs, while in decline according to Lovink (2008), particularly since the advent of *Facebook* and *Twitter* (created in 2006), continue to provide windows into the personal lives of bloggers, outlets for self-expression and storytelling that are now supplemented with other social multimedia platforms, such as those mentioned above and *Vimeo* and *YouTube* (created in 2004 and 2005, respectively). Thus social media networks not only establish connections between internet users but internet users can establish dispersed narratives and identities over several media platforms, allowing them to tell their stories in different ways to different people. The importance of the Web 2.0 era, and what sets it apart from the 1.0 era, is the high levels of interaction between netizens and the variety of platforms available for digital self-expression.

Some Muslim women use social media to engage in storytelling to share experiences that they feel cannot divulge to their families and/or their friends in various offline contexts; for example, they address issues that are considered taboo in their communities and/or they may ask religious questions that they would be uncomfortable addressing in face-to-face conversations at the mosque. Some women share their experiences with the hope that their efforts may contribute to changing impressions of Muslim women, both in their local communities and transnationally. They could seek out communities online in the absence of likeminded people in their immediate communities. It is not always clear if they are directing their comments at anyone in particular or, if they are, to whom, which is why these cybertexts can appropriately be rendered as storytelling in cyberspace, following the traditions of personal disclosure through online diaries and connections to likeminded people through weblogs.

There is a substantial volume of work related to “Digital Storytelling” (capitalized), which is typically institutionally sponsored digital recordings of oral histories; however, this chapter discusses the non-capitalized form of “digital storytelling.” Nick Couldry (2008) states that the non-capitalized form could include “the whole range of personal stories now being told in potentially public form using digital media resources” (p. 374). I refer to creativity through social media outlets, storytelling as well as other forms of self-expression, like fashion designing and creative writing, as “digital self-expression.” Digital self-expression could arguably minimize the extent to which people who encounter Muslim women in social media platforms would stereotype them. Even a few decades ago, mass media in Western countries were remiss to portray Muslim women as equals to their Western counterparts. An American reporter’s blatant denial of

a female Kuwaiti soldier's service during the first Gulf War (Fernea, 1998) is an apt example of how coverage of Arab women in Western media has contributed to stereotypical renditions of them. This reporter states, "Our view in America is that Arab women are behind our women, and they wear veils... That's what makes news... Negative sells in this area" (Fernea, 1998, p. 192).

However, it was difficult for the Western press to ignore the important role of Muslim women in the 2011 Arab Revolts. Two decades after the first Gulf War, news sources were more willing to publish pieces related to the contributions of Arab women in the struggles for liberation but they did not stray far from stereotypes. As mentioned previously, *Time* magazine featured "The Protester" to commemorate popular participation in widespread protests throughout the Arab and Western worlds, the "Arab Spring," as it was somewhat disparagingly referred to the West, and the Occupy movements, respectively.⁶⁵ The graphic on the cover accompanying "The Protester" was the reification of Orientalist imaginings of Arab women: a woman in hijab and niqab. Though the magazine did highlight the involvement of Muslim women in the protests and there were actually women protesting in niqab, the cover was meant to be provocative at the expense of relaying the multitudinous lived experience of Arab women. *Time* could have just as easily published a cover with an unveiled woman with an Egyptian or Tunisian flag or an actual photograph demonstrating the diversity of people who gathered in Tahrir Square to overthrow Mubarak but it did not because "they wear veils" rhetoric is still thriving.

⁶⁵ http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132_2102373-1,00.html

Despite the magazine's perpetuation of this stereotype, the inclusion of Arab women may not have been possible without their actual involvement in the protests—offline activism that was facilitated by digital activism. Aasma Mahfouz's viral video demanding that other Egyptians join her in Tahrir Square is one of the most well known examples of Arab women's participation in the Egyptian Revolution. Mahfouz, who is affiliated with the April 6 Movement, posted a video on *Facebook* on January 18, 2011, which was viewed more than 100,000 times in the week before the gathering in Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011.⁶⁶ Many Egyptian men and women of all stripes, moved by Mahfouz's digital framing of the rampant social injustices perpetuated by the regime, met in the square to overthrow the government.

Some women, like Mahfouz, employ social media to achieve seemingly insurmountable political objectives but many also use it to address everyday issues, some of which include the following: gender roles, marriage, family, sexuality, and so forth. Through their discussions of issues that may be taboo in their communities, social media provide Muslim women with a subtle, anonymizing, tool for “everyday resistance” (Scott, 1985 as cited in Ong, 1990, p. 258; Scott, 1998). These subtle everyday resisters are not so much inciting people to take to the streets but simply asking “why?” which is sometimes enough to chip away at well-established communal norms. Some of the digital self-expressions of Muslim women provoke imaginings of what should be, speaking to an overarching cosmopolitan aesthetic of basic rights to which citizens, particularly women, should be entitled. Some of these basic rights include being able to walk down the street without being molested or to seek employment in a hijab without it being an obstacle. It

⁶⁶ http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/8/asmaa_mahfouz_the_youtube_video_that

is undeniable that, despite Orientalist tropes, Muslim women participate in political activism, even revolution, but this thesis is more concerned with examining subtle forms of everyday resistance.

Digital self-expression also has the capacity to expand the collective memory of societies, at least the digital collective memory, variously labeled as the “networked” or “connective” memory (Hoskins, 2011). People who never thought of reading about Tunisian women, for example, might follow Lina Ben Hmenni on *Facebook* after reading in conventional news sources about her on-the-ground coverage of the Tunisian Revolution through social media networks. These new followers might continue to read about her experiences, not just as a revolutionary, but also as a woman. By directly engaging with Muslim women across the world through social media, social media users are able to bypass the essentialized portrayals of these women that are propagated in Western media and the lack of coverage related to them in conventional media in the Arab world (Mernissi, 2004).

Social media allow citizens to participate in the framing of events so that the collective consciousness of a nation is not limited to what is covered by (corporate and/or state controlled) mainstream media or to issues debated by politicians, which is instrumental in the maintenance of the “imagined communities” of nations theorized by Benedict Anderson (1991). Anderson (1991) argues that conventional media are foundational to the collective memory of nations, contributing to a sense of nationalism and belonging within these “imagined communities.” Events that are ignored by the mainstream can be reintroduced and disseminated by social media (Graf, 2008). One such example from the hijab discrimination dataset was the murder of an Egyptian expatriate

hijabi, Marwa El-Sherbini, in a German courtroom, which was barely picked up by local and international media in the West but created a media phenomenon thousand of miles away in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world.

The next section will detail El-Sherbini's story as well as the narratives of other martyred women. Following the discussion in this section regarding how Muslim women are expanding connective memories through their social media use, the major premise of the next section is that social media users are able to resuscitate the narratives of martyred women that are quickly forgotten in conventional media outlets. Martyrdoms were not very common in the datasets but discussions related to silences and disappearances, the topics of the subsequent sections, were quite prominent. Nonetheless, martyrdoms, as extremely tragic cases, are more likely to be mediated into and within the dominant transnational connective memory so they are employed here to facilitate the discussion of mediation.

The Voices of Martyred Muslim Women

The videos and photographs of the “blue bra girl” circulated within social media networks until the international press began disseminating them as well. The coverage of this brutal spectacle included many elements of a good news story—violence, state oppression, and lingerie, conveyed in a sound byte. A lesser-known but equally powerful narrative was the self-immolation of Fadwa Laroui, who was the first Arab/Maghrebi woman as of February 2012 to set herself on fire during the regional uprisings.⁶⁷ There were other self-immolations before Laroui's, including Bouazizi in Tunisia in December of 2010 and, according to Mahfouz, several in Egypt as well, but she was the first woman

⁶⁷ <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCATRE71M4ZF20110223>

to set herself aflame. Yet Laroui's act of protest neither captured the attention of local or international publics nor incited the outrage of Bouazizi's self-immolation. Lim (2013) claims that Bouazizi's death infuriated the Tunisian people because it was properly framed through "white lies" in the social media to capitalize on popular frustration related to corruption, censorship, cronyism, unemployment, and the general lack of meaningful political participation. Laroui, on the other hand, was a single mother from Morocco who was denied access to public housing ostensibly because she was unmarried.

In contrast to the colorful storytelling surrounding Bouazizi's suicide, Laroui's protest, which was posted on *YouTube*, was scarcely covered by local and international media. Laroui's tragic story, as a single working-class mother, apparently was not as relatable to the general population as Bouazizi's tale or, more to the point, how social media users framed his story. Bouazizi was rumored to be a college graduate who could not find a job so he operated a produce cart to support his family. In contrast, Laroui, a single mother, an identity that remains stigmatized in the Moroccan culture (Sadiqi, 2008), was denied public housing due to her unmarried status after the authorities destroyed her home in the *bidonville* (slums). There also appeared to be some shady agreements between authorities and a local developer that contributed to Laroui's failure to secure housing.⁶⁸ Bouazizi, driven to self-immolation, came to represent every ill associated with the Tunisian society, while Laroui remained a silenced social anomaly.

Notwithstanding Laroui's failed attempt to secure popular empathy, the internet has the capacity to promote the stories of Muslim women who would not otherwise have a voice. For instance, Laroui's story was mentioned in conjunction with the promotion of

⁶⁸ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rachel-newcomb/fadwa-laroui-morocco_b_829467.html

a film highlighting the tragic death of another martyred women on the SlutWalk Morocco (Woman Choufouch) *Facebook* page. SlutWalk Morocco, which is connected to the global SlutWalk initiative but aims to address street harassment and other types of gender violence and inequality in Morocco, used *Facebook* to promote the production of a few films that portrayed the life of Amina Filali, a 16 year-old girl who committed suicide after she was forced to marry the man who raped her.⁶⁹ One of these films, “475: When Marriage Becomes Punishment,” was created to honor the memory of Filali and to spread awareness about the unjust “rape law,” Article 475 of the Moroccan penal code.⁷⁰ Even though Laroui failed to become a symbol for the Moroccan protests that started in February of 2012, the film producers dedicated the film to both her and Filali so Laroui was commemorated as an important figure in struggle for the gender equality and human rights in Morocco, although not as a symbol of the struggle for greater political rights as Bouazizi was, despite the efforts of February 20 activists⁷¹ to frame her as the Moroccan Bouazizi.⁷²

“475: When Marriage Becomes Punishment“ was an overarching indictment of the system that perpetuates rape through allowing rapists to escape prosecution with impunity. Nadir Bouhmouch, a Moroccan activist connected with the February 20 Movement and a Film and Global Justice student at San Diego State University, who

⁶⁹https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=188042957976978&id=132681343491773&comment_id=534720&offset=0&total_comments=3

⁷⁰https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=409037705824345&id=132681343491773

⁷¹ The February 20 Movement is a popular youth activist groups that formed in Morocco during the 2011 Arab Revolts.

⁷² <http://moroccansforchange.com/2011/02/27/rip-fadoua-laroui/>
<http://www.thenation.com/blog/158878/fadoua-laroui-moroccan-mohamed-bouazizi#>
<https://www.facebook.com/MoroccansForChange/posts/206562199358114>

wrote, directed, and produced “My Makhzen and Me,”⁷³ directed the film. One of the co-founders of Woman Choufouch, Layla Belmahi, was also involved in the film’s production.⁷⁴ Bouhmouch released the film online on February 21, 2013 to commemorate the death of Laroui.⁷⁵ His connections to the February 20 Movement may have influenced his decision to release the film on the anniversary of Laroui’s death so that both women could be immortalized in the struggle for gender and human rights in Morocco and, particularly in Laroui’s case, social and economic justice. Despite the inability of Laroui’s death to capture popular imagination as an important figure in the Moroccan protests, through the expansion of the networked memory, her sacrifice lives on as an emblem for the ongoing activism of the February 20 Movement. In contrast, Amina Filali became an international symbol for human rights/gender equality in oppressive regimes because her narrative was sufficiently mediated at local and national levels, which inspired its international coverage.

The film, “475: When Marriage Punishment,” was one piece of the larger campaign spearheaded by online and offline activism, in which Woman Choufouch played an important role. As a popular *Facebook* page with over 8,000 likes and connections to other women’s rights movements through its solidarity with the global SlutWalk movement, Woman Choufouch was part of a larger network that spread awareness about the Filali tragedy. SlutWalk Toronto, for example, the initiator of global movement and the hub for discussions about other SlutWalks throughout the world, cited

⁷³ <http://www.nadirbouhmouch.com/bio.html>

⁷⁴ <http://www.alartemag.be/en/en-culture/marriage-as-punishment-documentary-about-womens-rights-in-morocco/>

⁷⁵ http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/10234/exposing-sexual-violence-in-morocco_an-interview-w

the Filali case on its *Facebook* page.⁷⁶ Micro-mediations such as this bolstered efforts to reform the Moroccan penal code through encouraging international news and social media coverage of Filali's narrative and, by extension, mediation into the dominant transnational connective memory.

Article 475, a law inherited from the colonial French penal code, allows rapists to escape prosecution through marrying their underage victims. Amina Filali was a teenager from Larache who, with juridical and familial complicity, was forced to marry the man who raped her when she was 15. Under Article 475 of the Moroccan penal code, men who are found guilty of rape can marry the underage survivors to avoid the 5-10 year prison sentence. The families of the rape survivors have to agree to the marriage but they are often pressured by the courts and influenced by the communal belief that the reputations of rape victims are sullied and, as such, the survivors will not have any other option for marriage if they do not marry the rapists. In addition to the violence to which Filali was subjected before she was forced to marry, Filali's rapist/husband, Mustafa Fallaq, physically abused her after they were wed. Fallaq's family refutes the suggestion that Fallaq raped Filali, insisting that the couple had engaged in consensual sex before they were married⁷⁷; however, perhaps the most damning evidence against Filali's supposed willing participation in the rape and marriage was her decision to ingest rat poison to escape from the brutal life to which she had been confined by her family, the courts, and the Moroccan state. After she took the poison, Fallaq left her to die rather than taking her to seek medical attention.⁷⁸ Similar to the attempts of the February 20

⁷⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/SlutWalkToronto/posts/370119686344770>

⁷⁷ <http://vimeo.com/60159666>

⁷⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/events/412117118803836/?ref=22>

Movement to frame Laroui as a heroine, some online news sources compared Filali to Bouazizi⁷⁹ because the incident awakened a sense of popular obligation to stymie the abuses of the state, particularly the apathy it had displayed in protecting vulnerable constituents of the population.

During its involvement in the campaign to reform Article 475, Woman Choufouch used *Facebook* to highlight the stories of several other girls who were pressured by the courts to marry rapists, indicating that the systemic cruelty that Filali faced was not an isolated incident. A few weeks after Filali's death, another teenage girl, Asmaa Kastit, was raped by her 39 year-old brother-in-law and forced to marry him.⁸⁰ Two months after Filali's suicide, 14 year-old Safae from Tangier went before a judge who pressured her to marry the man who raped her.⁸¹ She and her family refused, although her family did end up dropping the rape charges. The rapist impregnated her and continued to harass her because she refused to marry him. Safae suffered from severe depression and attempted suicide several times.⁸² A month after Safae's ordeal, in June of 2012, the parents of 14 year-old Hajar were pressured by authorities in Rabat to withdraw rape charges against a man in their neighborhood who had allegedly raped their daughter. In February 2012, the family had reported the rape to the authorities and to l'Association Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme (AMDH), a local NGO, but the man was not arrested until three months later. The family eventually succumbed to the pressure of the authorities, refused the presence of the ADMH in court, and agreed to have their daughter

⁷⁹ <http://www.morocoworldnews.com/2012/03/31206/amina-is-my-bouazizi-a-girl-who-committed-suicide-after-being-forced-to-marry-her-rapist/31206/>

⁸⁰ <http://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/9731/asmaa-kastit-histoire-d-une-nouvelle.html>

⁸¹ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=288517451237449&id=132681343491773&comment_id=1734279&offset=0&total_comments=8

⁸² <http://www.bladi.net/tanger-juge-mariage-violeur.html>

marry the rapist.⁸³ These incidents might not have been covered in local news were it not for Filali's sacrifice and the activism surrounding her death to prevent future implementations of Article 475.

Woman Choufouch's activism through social media complemented its offline activism. Woman Choufouch co-sponsored and publicized several offline events to spread awareness about the Filali tragedy and Article 475 toward the reformation the law. Woman Choufouch highlighted the first public demonstration in Larache on March 15, 2012 that mobilized in opposition to the contributing factors that led to Filali's suicide. Woman Choufouch sponsored a sit-in at the parliament building in Rabat two days later on March 17, 2012. Woman Choufouch also co-hosted several offline screenings of the films that were produced to spread awareness about Article 475. After ten months of online/offline campaigning, the government agreed to reform Article 475. Woman Choufouch published the following *Facebook* posting on January 23, 2013: "Nous avons réussi, mais il faut continuer le combat ! Encore beaucoup de travail à faire sur le code pénal et le code de la famille..." [We have succeeded, but we must continue the fight! Still a lot of work to do on the penal code and the family code..."]. Even after the campaign had succeeded in pressuring the government to take action, the movement continued to capture the international attention of the activist community; for example, in February 2013, Layla Belmahi, the co-founder of Woman Choufouch, was hosted by the Amnesty International Human Rights Festival to speak about women's rights in Morocco before sharing "475: When Marriage Becomes Punishment"⁸⁴ with the audience. This campaign against Article 475 highlights the complementarity of online and offline

⁸³ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=319447371481835&id=132681343491773

⁸⁴ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=403309749762247&id=132681343491773

activism and the importance of connections between art/film, activism, and media in the mediation of social symbols.

The activism surrounding the Laroui and Filali tragedies in Morocco was directed at the state but it was more difficult to frame in the case of the murder of a hijabi in Germany because the state avoided complicity, dismissing the possibility of systemic intolerance, through casting the incident as one of personal hatred and bigotry. The “Global Campaign to Stop Hijabophobia” *Facebook* page, in the hijab discrimination dataset, references this murder,⁸⁵ although it was not mentioned anywhere elsewhere in the datasets so I used Google’s top ten results in October of 2013 to frame the narrative. In 2008, Marwa El-Sherbini, a veiled Egyptian expatriate living in Germany, took Alex Wiens to court for verbal abuse after he called her an “Islamist,” a “bitch,” and a “terrorist” (ostensibly because she was wearing a hijab) in a public park where she had brought her 3 year-old son to play. It was during the appeals trial in July of 2009 that Wiens stabbed El-Sherbini 18 times as she attempted to leave the courtroom. She was three-months pregnant with her second child at the time. El-Sherbini’s husband, Elwi Okaz, and her three year-old son, Mustafa, were also present in court. Okaz managed to wrestle the knife away from Wiens after Wiens stabbed his wife but the armed security guard whom entered the courtroom mistook Okaz for the attacker and shot him. Mustafa watched his mother die and his father sustain critical injuries.

El-Sherbini attained international fame, especially in Egypt, as the “Hijab Martyr,” even though the incident did not receive much attention in Germany except among Muslims. Though her murder gained notoriety in Muslim-majority countries, it was

⁸⁵ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mmw/2009/07/living-in-denial-the-tragic-murder-of-marwa-el-sherbini/>

relatively unknown in the West. For example, discussants on a forum highlighted how Katie Couric's inability to identify El-Sherbini in a photo left the reporter open to Iranian President Ahmadinejad's attack related to Western media often ignoring stories related to violence against Muslims in Western countries.⁸⁶ Ahmadinejad's comment was warranted in this case as there appeared to be more articles in Western media about the Egyptian response to the slaying than related to the murder itself. The lack of mediation of El-Sherbini's narrative within Western media contributed to the paucity of online/offline mobilization in Western countries against discriminatory reactions to the hijab. Tellingly, although hundreds of Muslims and Arabs demonstrated in the streets of Germany after the murder of El-Sherbini,⁸⁷ *thousands* gathered for her funeral procession in Alexandria, Egypt.⁸⁸

The *Guardian* article compared the Arab/Muslim reactions to the tragedy both in the West and in the Arab region to the anti-West sentiment that was borne out of the Danish *Jyllands-Posten* caricature renditions of the Prophet Mohammad, signaling that this was an event that created a buzz within the transnational event-oriented digital ummah network.⁸⁹ I argue elsewhere (Robinson, *Hijab in the American Workplace*, under review), similar to the theoretical position taken up by Lim (2012), that the digital ummah network is not viable in regard to many issues facing Muslims (see Chapter 5 and the hijab discrimination case study in Chapter 6), being that that observance of Islam is highly diverse as are the contexts of various Muslim communities. Notwithstanding,

⁸⁶ <http://www.thephora.net/forum/showthread.php?t=55049>

⁸⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/07/german-trial-hijab-murder-egypt>

⁸⁸ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/07/06/headscarf-martyr-marwa-sh_n_226104.html

⁸⁹ This is a large, loosely connected network that encompasses various clusters of Muslim social media users. Nodes within the networks may rarely connect except when multiple bridges between these nodes begin mediating particular events/issues.

certain events resonate with Muslims in various contexts and the digital ummah network comes alive to discuss the intricacies of Muslimness in the modern world. The digital ummah network often takes up events related to Islamophobia and certain network clusters mediate and discuss women's issues. In this case, the digital ummah network mediated El-Sherbini's voice, as a woman who stood up for herself in the face of hatred and her death was imprinted onto the connective memory of the digital ummah network as her story either never arrived or quickly began to fade in the West.

This section framed the ways in which social media have the capacity to digitally capture the narratives of Muslim women who can no longer speak for themselves. Social media have the ability to keep the stories of these women alive when they are cycled out of the mainstream media but some narratives are more readily mediated than others, which I will discuss further in this chapter's "Discussion." The next section reveals how the online discussions of Muslim women address taboos, such as virginity and veiling, toward preventing future martyrdoms, disappearances, and forced silences. Muslim women are challenging the norm of silence in the safety of cyberspaces by digitally amplifying their voices.

Speaking Out Against Disappearances through Violence

Similar to Moroccan social media users' opposition to gender-discriminatory laws, the *techno-ikhtilat* data revealed that in March of 2009 Jordanian bloggers came together online to decry Articles 340 and 98 of the Jordanian penal code after a man and his two sons were convicted of beating their daughter/sister to death in 2007 for "going out in full make-up."⁹⁰ Articles 340 and 98 result in reduced sentences for men who kill their wives

⁹⁰ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/04/08/jordan-no-honour-in-killing/>

or female relatives in a “fit of fury” because these women have ostensibly engaged in “adultery.” There is growing awareness of honor killings through conventional media but commentary in social media suggests that conventional coverage does not always demonstrate unequivocal support for the women who are killed by their families. For example, Fadi Zaghmout, a Jordanian blogger writing at the *Arab Observer*, shared a letter that he sent to several Jordanian media outlets that demanded that they take a definitive stance against honor crimes.⁹¹ Nevertheless, Kinzi, an active blogger in the Jordanian blogosphere, suggests that the heightened awareness of honor killings has contributed to more appropriate sentences for men who perpetrate these crimes: for example, the father involved in the aforementioned case was sentenced to seven years rather than the customary six-month prison term under Articles 340 and 98.⁹² Despite the growing awareness of the issue through social media activism and coverage of honor killings in the conventional media, within weeks of the conviction of the father in the 2007 killing, a 19 year-old brother killed his older sister because she left her “home to go to an unknown destination.”⁹³

Another issue that has contributed to online discussions among Muslim women from Jordan and other countries throughout the world is the universal obsession with female virginity. Muslim women have conversed about ways of ensuring the illusion of virginity on their wedding nights in the dataset related to the artificial hymen. Some mentioned that they would like to be able to tell the truth about their sexual experience but the societal and familial repercussion might be dire. The honor killings of the girl

⁹¹ <http://thearabobserver.blogspot.com/2009/03/stop-crimes-against-women.html>

⁹² <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/04/08/jordan-no-honour-in-killing/>

⁹³ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/04/08/jordan-no-honour-in-killing/>

who went out in “full make-up” and the other one who left the house to go to “unknown destinations” were obviously extreme case, but the failure of women to bleed on their wedding nights is often perceived as evidence of sexual impropriety, which might result in divorce and social ostracism. Virginité, as rendered by proponents of the “cult of the hymen,”⁹⁴ is the presence or absence of the hymen. Cast in these terms, it makes little difference if the hymen ruptured through injury, exercise, or other non-sexual acts—what matters is whether or not a woman can produce blood when it is necessary to do so. Perhaps the women most at risk of scandal and social isolation, in the worst cases honor killings, are those who have never had sex but unwittingly ruptured their hymens through injuries and those who have very elastic hymens that may not break during their first sexual encounter because they do not make plans to produce the bloody sheets through alternative means. Women who can afford it might get their virginité certified by a doctor or have it re-sewn through hymenoplasty, but the unsuspecting are left to the mercy of anatomy.

An Arab woman initiated a conversation on a transnational forum that well illustrated aspects of virginité obsession. A woman from Qatar, “Designer,” started a thread on the *Fluther* forum entitled “How can I fake my virginité?”⁹⁵ “Designer” was considering her friend’s advice to use the “virginité pill,” which is inserted into the vagina prior to intercourse to produce a blood-like substance, but she was concerned about the safety and efficacy of the pill. One respondent, “Jack79,” encouraged her to be honest about her sexual experience but “Designer” stated that it was not possible to be truthful in her social context. “Designer” claimed that she had heard about one Qatari

⁹⁴ <http://www.afrik-news.com/article15419.html>

⁹⁵ <http://www.fluther.com/36634/how-can-i-fake-my-virginité/>

woman who was nearly beaten to death by her relatives and another who was twice run over by her male relative's car when the women's families discovered that they were not virgins. After hearing about the possibility of "Designer's" life being in danger, "Jack79" reconsidered his earlier advice and made the seminal point that perhaps she might be less judgmental "when she finds out that her own daughter or daughter-in-law is not a virgin." This is certainly a possibility in regard to how changing norms take root.

"Designer" notes that she could not attempt honesty because she is fearful of the reactions of her family and the larger community. She does not appear to want to lie but she feels that she has no other option. She is not interested in being deceitful to preserve her own reputation but her comments convey her fear of becoming another martyred woman. Her posting garnered responses from two other women, "fuschia" and "qzofheart," who claimed to be in the same situation; thus "Designer's" own struggle, and employing social media to mitigate it, may contribute to the creation of a support network and facilitate the subtle resistance of other women as well. Although this is a form of resistance that is taking place at a personal level throughout the world, women are able to reach out to and collectivize with other women around this common issue in online spaces. As I will discuss in the case study related to PHD in Chapter 6, networked discussions related to individual resistance could contribute to the mediation of loosely defined activism that does not require the backing of online/offline social movements or local organizations. This could also be the case with networked interactions related to faking one's virginity. Furthermore, if men read online dialogues about women resorting to virginity pills and Chinese-made hymens, it may encourage them, especially men who are not themselves virgins, to question the importance of the hymen-measure in gauging

the worthiness of women as brides. Thus these discussions could contribute to the evolution of social norms on various fronts.

In the end, “Designer” decided to call off her wedding but she states that “time is ticking,” meaning that she can only put off marriage for so long. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, there were several passages in the Muslim spinsterhood dataset that imply, similar to “Designer’s” case, that the loss of a woman’s hymen may be a contributing factor to spinsterhood. In other words, women who are unable to “prove” their virginity may avoid marriage contracts until they have reached their “expiration date” on marriage market, which could be achieved in some places by 25 years of age. After all, the stigma of remaining unmarried may be less significant than the shame of facing divorce for failing to produce bloody sheets on the wedding night. Nonetheless, as Chapter 4 will demonstrate, women who remain unmarried are also shamed as Muslim communities often cast spinsters as social pariahs and ostracized them from the larger community, which results in their *de facto* disappearances; however, this social isolation is likely to be a more attractive option than being disappeared through violence, such as the disappearances that “Designer” discusses.

Violence against Muslim women that contributes to their disappearances is not limited to the home as the HarassMap data demonstrates. Violence in the public sphere, like sexual harassment, may also contribute to disappearances, particularly because some social actors tend to blame women for being harassed simply for being present on the street. One well-known example of this tendency in the Egyptian context was broached on Ahmed Awadalla’s blog, *Rebel With A Cause*. Awadalla discussed reactions to protesters attacking a celebrity performer, Sherihan, during a liberal/secularist

demonstration in Tahrir Square on May 27, 2011. He states that some people reacted by blaming the Sherihan: “Some wonder why she went out of her home!”⁹⁶ Similarly, Rebecca Chiao, the co-founder of HarassMap, notes that “stay home” and “get veiled” are common responses to women who complain about being sexually harassed.⁹⁷ Mona Ezzat articulated an analogous statement in connection with the online “End Sexual Harassment” campaign. Says Ezzat, “In a male-dominated society where the woman is supposed to stay at home and cover all her body, the society puts all the responsibility on the woman to protect herself.”⁹⁸

While it may seem absurd that women could be blamed for sexual harassment for simply leaving their homes, it appears that some women have chosen to conform to this dominant societal prescription to ensure their safety by withdrawing from the public sphere. Social media users have shared the narratives of Egyptian women who were self-disappeared, or self-confined in the home, due to harassment. For instance, “Sama Singer,” an Egyptian woman blogging at *Between Brackets*, shares the narrative of one of her friends who was harassed by a mob of boys, one of which removed his belt and beat her with it. After two years of daily harassment, Singer claims that her friend “is now afraid to get out of her house as she has the idea that every man in the street is a savage animal who is awaiting her.”⁹⁹ Self-disappearances have occurred on a larger scale as well. The gang harassments in downtown Cairo during the Eid festivities of 2006, for instance, resulted in the widespread self-confinement of women in their homes¹⁰⁰ (also

⁹⁶ <http://rwac-egypt.blogspot.com/2011/05/sexually-harassing-egypts-revolution.html>

⁹⁷ <http://mobileactive.org/harassmap-plan-track-sexual-harassment-egypt>

⁹⁸ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/14618.aspx>

⁹⁹ <http://betweenbracts.blogspot.com/2011/06/i-share-my-daily-harassment-experience.html>

¹⁰⁰ <http://andreasfares.blogspot.com/2011/06/sexual-harassment-blog.html>

see Chapter 2). “Sina,” an Egyptian woman blogging at *Natural Conspiracy*, relates the trend of self-disappearances to the growing influence of conservative Islam. She believes that the progressively “barbaric” tendencies of the Egyptian society have fueled the epidemic of sexual harassment and she sees no end in sight for “the sweeping Islamist trend of considering women “unmentionables,” who need to be locked up and treated like shit.”¹⁰¹ In extreme cases, when women are unable to protect themselves through self-confinements, they may opt for martyrdoms instead. For example, a 15 year-old girl jumped out of a second story window, attempting suicide, after the building owner’s son harassed her in the apartment complex where she lives.¹⁰²

Even for women who do not completely self-confine themselves, most will refrain from going out after dark,¹⁰³ which may suggest they have internalized part of the blame for sexual harassment even if they are not as severely traumatized as some of their disappeared friends. Other members of the Egyptian society, like parents who refuse to allow their daughters to go out,¹⁰⁴ have also internalized the norm of victim-blaming, which Muslim women are speaking out against in social media. As Hena Zuberi of *MuslimMatters.org* states, “Men need to support their daughters, sisters, wives when they complain of harassment instead of forbidding them from going out or blaming them for causing the incident.”¹⁰⁵ The cases of parental confinement can no longer be referred to as self-confinement; they are more appropriately framed as forced confinement. Until the Egyptian society rejects the victim-blaming associated with sexual harassment, some of

¹⁰¹ <http://natural-conspiracy.blogspot.com/2012/08/harassment-in-ramadan.html>

¹⁰² <http://bikyamasr.com/35511/egypt-teenager-attempts-to-kill-herself-after-being-harassed/>

¹⁰³ <http://www.bikyamasr.com/62032/egypts-sexual-harassment-accepted-but-not-acceptable/>

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.greenprophet.com/2011/05/women-rights-muslims-harassmap/>

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.greenprophet.com/2011/05/women-rights-muslims-harassmap/>

which may be internalized by women, leading them to attempt various interventions to prevent harassment (like veiling or staying in after dark), women and their families will continue to engage in self or forced confinement to varying degrees because, even if some women do not blame themselves for harassment, the majority of the society likely will and, despite the interventions women employ to protect themselves, the only nearly foolproof measure is to remain in their homes.

Social media users involved in the “End Sexual Harassment” and HarassMap campaigns are not just speaking out against sexual harassment for other Egyptian women or Muslim women in other countries, but for women all over the world. Muslim women share their digital self-expressions, not only to be heard and to share the stories of disappeared women, they also appeal to the lived experiences of other women, Muslim or not, through their narratives. While they clearly want to be heard by the larger Egyptian society, it is also possible that one of the aims of these campaigns is to create a universal basic level of safety and security for women in physical public spheres all over the world, which speaks to vernacular cosmopolitan praxis involving the disclosure of local narratives toward universal objectives. I will return to this possibility shortly.

This section has discussed how Muslim women use social media to share the narratives of women who have been disappeared through violence in an effort to prevent future disappearances and martyrdoms. The next section will present other disappearances through violence and state-imposed confinements related to Muslim women’s observance of their interpretations of the Qur’anic mandate on modesty, typically rendered through forms of veiling.

Disappearances Through Modesty

North of the silenced voices in Egypt, there are women speaking out about disappearances in France. In France, we have a clear picture of the number of disappeared Muslim women; based on figures in the NiqaBitch dataset, there are approximately 2,000 niqabis in France who are affected by the ban that came into effect in April of 2011.¹⁰⁶ However, this number cannot project the number of women who are affected by niqab bans in other European nations, such as Belgium, and other nations that are considering similar bans, such as the Netherlands and a part of Switzerland. NiqaBitch opposed the ban to “protect citizens' freedom”¹⁰⁷ because the two women involved in the protest do not believe that laws should dictate how people dress or that the ban serves any purpose other than the marginalization of women.¹⁰⁸

In terms of marginalization, many believed that the ban would not save women from being forced to wear the niqab by their “oppressive” husband, the French government’s primary justification for the law, but that it would lead to the state-imposed confinements of the women who wear the niqab because it is their interpretation of the Islamic mandate on modesty. Palfrey, one commenter on the NiqaBitch *YouTube* video, says “those 1,900 [niqabis] may well feel compelled (either by their own beliefs, or those of their immediate family) to remain indoors.”¹⁰⁹ “mikeeverest” makes a similar comment: “if the ban is legally enforced, will women be forced/choose to stay at home

¹⁰⁶ <http://connexionfrance.com/Woman-arrested-protest-Avignon-France-veil-burqa-niqab-12662-view-article.html>

<http://www.rue89.com/2010/09/30/minishort-et-niqab-balade-provoc-dans-paris-avant-la-loi-168779#comments-start>

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw32TU7uAi4>

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw32TU7uAi4>

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw32TU7uAi4>

for the rest of their lives in order to avoid being “seen?”¹¹⁰ Although the resulting forced confinement, either by the family or the state, would manifest in the same way, most commenters believed that forced confinements by family members, specifically husbands, would be more likely than niqabis engaging in self-confinement due to their belief in the sanctity of the veil. “Freeman Moxy,” another *YouTube* interlocutor, states, “If they are really that cowed, it is more likely that their oppressive husbands will no longer let them leave the house at all.”¹¹¹ “Jibbajibba,” “Gaiseric,” “Eipermoid,” and “Ionie” on *YouTube* and “Autistic Reading” on *Rue 89*¹¹² advance similar claims. Although they make these statements to illustrate the futility of the ban, they reinforce the government’s stereotype of Muslim women to make their point.

One commenter, “Emiboot,” claims that most of these “ghosts” (veiled women) are actually French women of European origin who have converted to Islam and they wear the veil due to their own strongly held beliefs, not because their possibly non-Muslim families force them to cover or due to cultural indoctrination.¹¹³ Another problematic aspect of the ban is that, while the law also targets families (husbands) that force women to veil, it does not address community norms in neighborhoods that may pressure women to veil. A commenter on *Rue 89*, “Salaves,” for instance, cites an article in the French press about “a young single woman with a child who said she was forced to put the burqa to avoid being constantly scolded by groups of young people of the city

¹¹⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw32TU7uA14>

¹¹¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw32TU7uA14>

¹¹² <http://www.rue89.com/2010/09/30/minishort-et-niqab-balade-provoc-dans-paris-avant-la-loi-168779#comments-start>

¹¹³ <http://www.rue89.com/2010/09/30/minishort-et-niqab-balade-provoc-dans-paris-avant-la-loi-168779#comments-start>

where she lives.”¹¹⁴ “Salaves’ s” statement highlights the onus on single mothers to prove their morality in communities where they are perceived as social enigma. This communal pressure is not necessarily a result of the inherent conservatism of Islam; it could just as likely be related to the pervasiveness of Islamophobia in the French society that leads to greater insularity of Muslim communities, a dynamic that appears to be common in many Muslim-minority countries. On the other hand, considering “Emiboot’s” comment above about most niqabis being European French converts, the article cited by “Salaves” may just be state propaganda to augment support for the ban.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean in North America, niqabis do not have to worry about bans but both niqabis and hijabis have to be concerned with discrimination, even violent forms of discrimination. This invisible form of discrimination is perhaps more insidious than institutionalized discrimination through legal injunctions because the former is dismissed as personal bigotry, similar to the slaying of El-Sherbini, rather than being addressed as a manifestation of systemic racism and xenophobia in “multicultural” societies (Mohanty, 2003). In the decade following 9/11, there was a steady increase in the number of complaints registered with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Arab Anti-Discrimination Council (ADC) in the United States. Perhaps this is related to Muslims being framed as synonymous with terrorists in Western conventional media since the attacks on 9/11 or maybe Muslims and Arabs in North America have become more aware of the pervasiveness of Islamophobia in Western societies since the incident, which has contributed to more of them coming forward when they faced with intolerance.

¹¹⁴ <http://www.rue89.com/2010/09/30/minishort-et-niqab-balade-provoc-dans-paris-avant-la-loi-168779#comments-start>

Following 9/11, the incidence of violent attacks against hijabis jumped exponentially in the United States. In September 2001, CAIR and ADC reported a substantial increase in the number of complaints involving the verbal and physical harassment of hijabis as well as those related to hijabs being ripped off of the heads of Muslim women and girls, mainly younger hijabis at schools and universities. In New Orleans, a teacher reported that one of her student who wore hijab dropped out of school because she became fearful of the climate of intolerance. The same circumstances led another high school girl in Nevada to drop out in 2004. In 2007, CAIR posted a video on *YouTube* related to an incident involving an 11-year-old hijabi in Florida who had her hijab snatched from her head by a classmate. The classmate then allegedly threatened to shoot her. Hijabis are not only vulnerable to harassment in schools but in public spaces in general. In 2004, a pregnant hijabi was walking home with her toddler in Massachusetts when a man verbally accosted her, tore off her hijab, and brutally beat her until she lost consciousness.¹¹⁵ Since these events were reported to grassroots organizations rather than through the digital self-expression of Muslim women in social media, it appears that hijabis have come to rely on entities such as CAIR and ADC to spread awareness, although CAIR and ADC use social media to disseminate the narratives of hijabis who have faced discrimination. CAIR, in particular, has uploaded hundreds of video narratives to *YouTube*, many of which involve discrimination against hijabis and both organizations are active on *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Considering the steady increase in complaints of violence, it seems that the dominant American culture is unwilling to accept Muslims, particularly those who overtly express their faith through the hijab in public spaces,

¹¹⁵ <http://www.adc.org/PDF/hcr07.pdf>

despite the efforts of these grassroots organizations. Therefore, some hijabis, such as the students discussed above, will likely continue to withdraw from public spaces. The instances of violence and harassment, particularly the ones that involve girls dropping out of school, speak to disappearances because the institutions charged with keeping Muslim girls safe have failed them so they withdraw from the society that cannot accept them.

Unlike the El-Sherbini tragedy, some incidents in the United States that reach a significant level of notoriety through grassroots efforts are mediated into conventional media, like the Boudlal v. Disney and Khan v. A&F (see Chapter 6) cases, although these cases quickly fizzle out of the 24-hour news cycle. On rare occasions, Muslim women have had the opportunity to share their 2-second stories in the mainstream press but these are typically extreme cases that have been reported to the authorities. For example, in a *YouTube* video of an ABC News report, Nohayia Javed, a Muslim women going to college in Texas, states that she so often faces discrimination that she no longer goes out in public by herself.¹¹⁶ She was the alleged victim of a hate crime on the Baylor campus, involving a man with a Southern accent who beat her while shouting “Islamic expletives.”¹¹⁷ Javed’s narrative was part of a larger segment that included a “sting operation” conducted by an *ABC News* crew in which they staged a hijabi customer at a bakery to investigate how Texans would react to blatant Islamophobia directed at veiled Muslim women. According the *ABC* reporter, Javed helped to design the experiment. The counter-person/actor in this experiment refused to serve the hijabi actress and even suggested that she may be carrying a bomb. A minority of the customers (6) applauded

¹¹⁶ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=285shv-iW_I&NR=1&feature=endscreen

¹¹⁷ http://www.islamawareness.net/Islamophobia/America/america_islamophobia_027.html

the counterperson's discriminatory behavior, the majority (22) remained silent, and about one in three (13) stood up for the "Muslim woman."

Like Javed, Slma Shelbayah was able to share her story with a mainstream media outlet, *CNN*, and the *CNN* interview was posted on *YouTube*.¹¹⁸ Shelbayah filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission in 2008 after Dr. Mary Stuckey, a professor in Communication at Georgia State University, repeatedly verbally harassed her during class. On one of these occasions, Stuckey asked Shelbayah if she had a bomb under her hijab. After Shelbayah filed the complaint, she lost her funding as a doctoral student and the university terminated her positions as a visiting scholar and with the Middle East Institute Exchange Program.¹¹⁹ While these mainstream news reports have the potential to reach a significant audience, the case study on hijab discrimination in Chapter 6 suggests that mainstream coverage of discrimination against hijabis might contribute to further backlash against Muslims rather than countering violence against them. It will also demonstrate that the negative mainstream reactions to these cases might dissuade some Muslim women from coming forward to report discrimination.

Some Muslim women prefer to share their stories with grassroots organizations and/or the mainstream news media, if given the rare opportunity, because perhaps they believe it is important to create a unified voice among Muslims to spread awareness about the discrimination to which they are subjected. Nonetheless, their stories are also mediated into social media networks through *YouTube*, for example, as the Javed and Shelbayah incidents suggest. Thus people who missed the airing of these interviews on *CNN* and *ABC* could still access the narratives of these Muslim women in online spaces,

¹¹⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiT8pSpN1-U&feature=related>

¹¹⁹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/yvonne-r-davis/georgia-state-university_b_225951.html

propelling the reach of the narratives after they are cycled out of mainstream media. On the other hand, in cases in which conventional media are unlikely to pick up the stories of everyday harassment, Muslim women have shared their stories directly on social media. For example, in a *YouTube* video, Stephanie Luff, a blogger connected to both the hijab discrimination and the hijabi fashion datasets, discusses a Muslim woman who decided to remove her hijab because she could not find employment and, when she unveiled, she was quickly able to find a job.¹²⁰ Luff's video narrative suggests that the disappearances of hijabis and niqabis may be occurring not only through the self-confinement of women who have tired of discrimination but refuse to remove their hijabs and niqabs but also through some Muslim women deciding to unveil to ensure their safety and/or attain employment, for example. Everyday discrimination in subtle and overt forms was an important topic of discussion among hijabi fashion bloggers, which demonstrates the extent of the stigmatization of the veil, although most hijabis used the spaces provided by their blogs to encourage hijabis to persevere with the religious practice of hijab despite the distain they face from the dominant cultures in Muslim-minority societies, perhaps even their inability to secure employment (see Chapter 6).

As a final point regarding the disappearances of hijabis and niqabis, it should be emphasized that there were comments related to discrimination in North Africa against women based on their levels of modesty in the hijab discrimination and hijabi fashion datasets. For example, the veil is banned in certain venues in Turkey, Tunisia, and Algeria.¹²¹ In a posting on *We Love Hijab*, a commenter, Samira, says that in Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt there are unspoken limitations to the employment options for women

¹²⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4BFyylbcpk&feature=related>

¹²¹ <http://www.themodernreligion.com/women/hijab-world.htm>

in hijab,¹²² especially in establishments that cater to tourists. In a *Facebook* posting, two Egyptian hijabis, Sherine Gala El-Messary and Zeinab Y El-Fiqi, reiterate this statement, claiming that veiled women in Egypt are denied entry to various social venues and they are denied employment with certain companies.¹²³ Similarly, Mona Eltahawy discusses the discriminatory hiring practices of companies in the region in a *Huffington Post* article, entitled “Headscarves and Hymens.” She states that Egyptian women have lost court battles related to their right to wear hijab as television anchors on state-run networks and as flight attendants on Egypt Air. In the Egyptian context, women could face obstacles to employment for wearing the hijab and violence in the street for not wearing it. Although many social media interlocutors suggest that veiling does not protect women from street harassment, when a woman complains about harassment, one of the first statements that is mentioned in regarding to the incident is whether or not the woman was veiled. While there are some unspoken social restrictions related to wearing the hijab, particularly stemming from corporate structures that want to present a “modern image,” there are also social pressures to veil, mainly articulated by religious authorities and social actors who promote traditional interpretations of Islam, which also underpin the victim-blaming of unveiled women when they are harassed in public spaces.

Nonetheless, when hijabis struggle for their right to wear hijab in Western public spaces, particularly spaces in which the right to religious freedom is ostensibly guaranteed, some Western commenters demand that those who immigrated from Arab countries go back to their countries of origin where their form of modesty is presumed to be acceptable. These Western social media users are most likely unaware that hijabis also

¹²² <http://welovehijab.com/2010/02/26/hot-topic-whos-got-a-problem-with-hijab/>

¹²³ <http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=150973238273781&topic=204>

face discrimination in parts of the Arab world, due to their essentialized, neo-Orientalist vision of the region. The issues of discrimination against hijabi and the stigmatization of veiling create bridges between many cultures even though the discrimination and resulting disappearances occur for distinct reasons based on context. In Western countries, veiling is stigmatized because of the pervasiveness of Islamophobia, resulting from the racialization and politicization of Islam. In Arab countries, it has because a contested symbol of the anti-modern, unwelcomed in venues that wish to convey a “modern image.” Since hijab/niqab related issues affect so many women around the world, they present a cosmopolitan opportunity for dialogue across various cultures through social media, which can facilely and instantaneously connect dissimilar people throughout the world around a specific topic, illustrated by the hijabi fashion network and the NiqaBitch protest.

This section has discussed the disappearances of veiled Muslim women. The self-confinement of hijabis is partially forced because, if Muslim women had adequate protection from the states or sufficient representation within the lawmaking apparatuses, in the case of France, they might not feel compelled to engage in self-confinement to protect themselves and their religious freedoms. In contrast to these disappeared women, other Muslim women have become hyper-visible in Western media. Aside from the narratives that reinforce the tropes of victimized Muslim women, the next section will highlight another group of Muslim women whose voices are likely to be circulated in Western conventional media—those of “native informant spokespeople”—because their perspectives on Muslim women are largely in agreement with those of dominant Western cultures and they advance common stereotypes of Muslim women and their lived

experiences. In opposition, social media users utilize online spaces created by the media coverage of the native informant spokespeople to refute the extent to which these spokespeople's opinions actually represent larger communities of Muslims.

Well-Mediated Perspectives

Considering the Muslim women who have become favored spokespeople for Muslim women everywhere in mainstream American and other Western media and cultures, who tend to be unveiled and highly critical of various interpretations of the Islamic faith—Mona Eltahawy, Irshad Manji, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali are a few such examples mentioned in the datasets—Westerners may mistakenly perceive other forms of Islam, especially the forms that these spokespeople reject, as extremist. These “native informants,” as Rey Chow (1993) calls them, are criticized in turn by Muslims in social media for presuming that they have the right to speak for other Muslim women. While these Western-essentializing informants are interesting because they demonstrate the variance associated with the Islamic faith, they should not be perceived as the only Muslim women who have liberated themselves from the misogyny and violence connected to Islam, the so-called “safe” version of Muslims, but simply Muslims who conform to particular version Islam.

A blogger known as “Wood Turtle,” in the hijabi fashion data, broaches the topic of “safe” Muslims in a posting about “hijabistas,” which is what Western conventional media coverage tends to call hijabi fashion bloggers. Says “Wood Turtle,” “Ever since 9/11 the Media has been looking for the “safe” Islam.”¹²⁴ She argues that Western media have sensationalized this conspicuously consumptive version of Islam that mixes

¹²⁴ <http://woodturtle.wordpress.com/2010/07/23/hijabista/>

““Western dress” and hijab” and they have staged the so-called “hijabista” as a “safe” typology of Islam, ostensibly because the “hijabistas” are too busy shopping to raise future terrorists. However, the most acceptable spokespeople, the ones mentioned above, are unveiled. The notion that there is one safe version of Islam, which tends to be populated by “Westernized” or “liberated” Muslims, and all other Islamic beliefs veer toward extremes is analogous with the comments offered by “ForSoothSayer,” a Christian Egyptian woman who blogs at *Unnecessary and not very diverting musings*, in the HarassMap dataset. “ForSoothSayer” states that she resists the urge to blame veiled women for the heightened sexual harassment that unveiled women face, although she believes that “the ubiquity of the veil makes the unveiled stand out in a manner that attracts attention.”¹²⁵ It is not so much that unveiled women are attempting to attract more attention—they may not believe that the hijab is mandated by the Qur’an or they may not even be Muslims—but some harassers wrongly perceive the contrast as an invitation to direct “sexual advances” at unveiled women.

In this perhaps inelegant analogy, Western mainstream media are sexual harassers. These media devise a model for a “safe” Muslim’s appearance and beliefs. On the Egyptian streets, the model of the woman least likely to be available to male advances is the fully veiled woman in niqab, hijab, and abaya. Other choices in dress lead the harassers to fallaciously judge the woman’s sexual availability or desire to attract male “attention.” The “safe” Muslims, like native informant spokespeople, who claim to have the credentials to speak on behalf of other Muslims, also create a standard by which other Muslims are judged. A “safe” Muslim basically regurgitates the ideals of conservative

¹²⁵ <http://forsoothsayings.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/sexual-harassment-fuck-selmeya/>

Western ideology and fabricates the illusion that only Muslims who agree with pre-established Western norms are “safe” and other interpretations are necessarily more extreme. This dynamic tends to result in a hollow form of cosmopolitanism in which select members of the cultural “other” move into the category of cosmopolitan through their agreement with Western ideals. If the mainstream media and political rhetoric could somehow move toward framing the overwhelming majority of Muslims as moderate with small strains that are more radical, as is the case with all religions, Western countries could reconsider their Islamophobic tendencies and move beyond Americentric/Eurocentric cosmopolitanism that selects the criteria through which people are assigned the statuses of cosmopolitans and anti-cosmopolitans based on their conformity to Western norms.

Although a niqabi in abaya might not fit the typical (Eurocentric) profile of a cosmopolitan, a genuine framing of cosmopolitanism would include very different types of people, not just those who agree with Western worldviews and dress like Westerners do. In a *CNN* debate that was posted on *YouTube* between Mona Eltahawy and Hebah Ahmed, a niqabi based in New Mexico, Eltahawy states that she supports the ban of the niqab everywhere. Say Eltahawy, “I detest...the niqab and I say this as a Muslim woman...It represents an ideology that does not believe in a Muslim woman’s right to do anything...[the niqab] dangerously equates piety with the disappearance of women.”¹²⁶ In this quote, Eltahawy stresses her credentials “as a Muslim woman,” to substantiate her claim that she is representing the correct version of Islam, while alluding to the idea that

¹²⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPpAskcDOcw&feature=related>

the niqab is an instrument of subjugation that implies affiliation with a singular extremist “ideology,” an incorrect version of Islam. Ahmed counters,

[The niqab ban is] yet another example of men telling women how to dress, how to live their life. It’s another way to try to control women. To try to legislate what women wear is not only wrong it’s against human rights...violates the whole basis of democracy...Just because someone does not agree with my interpretation of Islam...doesn’t mean we can use laws to violate freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

Although Ahmed says she wears the niqab by volition, Eltahawy believes that the “right-wing” indoctrination that underpins the niqab leaves women with little choice other than veiling or “hellfire” because this “ideology” sets up a spectrum of piety positioning niqabis as the pinnacle of righteousness. In other words, she claims that women are inculcated with the belief that the more they cover their bodies, the closer they come to God. Eltahawy also states that French women’s rights activists support the ban because women in the projects, perhaps referring to the *barbès*, are pressured by the community to wear the niqab, which is supported by “Salaves” comment above in reference to the (propagandized?) article in the French press. Ahmed refutes this argument, citing statistics that put the number of French niqabis at 2,000, the majority of whom are European French converts rather than French Muslims of North African descent.

Ahmed emphasizes that it is her own choice to veil. Says Ahmed, “...when I choose to cover this way I am fighting against a systematic oppression against women in which women’s bodies are being sexualized and objectified...” This form of oppression, Ahmed opines, manifests in unhealthy diets, eating disorders, plastic surgery, and so forth: efforts to create “the perfect body.” She also lays bare the idea that the niqab is a symbol of oppression, stating that it “is a different form of empowerment in which I think when I’m in public my sexuality is in my control and people have to deal with my brain

and who I really am and not judge me by my body.” Ahmed categorically denies the proposition that women are forced to veil, which rings untrue in relation to a few of the comments in the hijabi fashion dataset, but Eltahawy attempts to deny that any woman veils of her own free will, so clearly the truth is somewhere between these polarized viewpoints.

Global Voices Online published an exposé on “niqab punditry,” featuring reactions to the Eltahawy/Ahmed debate. Most of the blog postings that Jillian C. York included in article tended to side with Ahmed on the debate. Shanfaraa, an Egyptian American bloggers, rejects Eltahawy’s assertion that Muslim women cannot throw off religious indoctrination, suggesting the Eltahawy is an apt example of a Muslim woman who was able to do just that, being that she was raised in Saudi Arabia and does not now follow “Wahhabi-Salafi theology.”¹²⁷ Shanfaraa goes on to claim that through her support of the niqab ban, Eltahawy is tacitly agreeing with the “French State’s characterization of...[the niqab] as a form of slavery.” A Lebanese-American female blogger, who writes at *The Cynical Arab*, claims that Eltahawy has become the “go-to feminist icon for the “liberation” of women” and, like Shanfaraa, disputes the idea that niqabis “have no apparent mind of their own.”¹²⁸ The “Mouse,” a niqabi blogging at *Musings of a Muslim Mouse*, debunks Eltahawy’s homogenous, right-wing characterization of the “ideology” (singular) the underpins the niqab simply by referencing a few niqabis in her family—her “Sufi aunt” and her “Indian aunty.”¹²⁹ Another blogger, Sami Kishawi, reiterates the point made by “Wood Turtle” about “safe” Muslims. Says Kishawi, “she boldly claims to

¹²⁷ <http://shanfaraa.com/2011/04/the-niqab-ban-and-mona-el-tahawi/>

¹²⁸ <http://thecynicalarab.wordpress.com/2011/04/13/on-caged-birds-and-liberators/>

¹²⁹ <http://muslimmouse.blogspot.com/2011/04/open-letter-to-mona-el-tahawy.html>

represent entire groups of people...She used her “Egyptianness” to elevate her agenda during the revolution and to push her ideas through mainstream media, which is searching for that supremely rare “liberated Muslim woman.”¹³⁰ Kishawi also reinforces my analogy of the sexual harasser and Western media, stating, “Naturally, she insists that she’s right and that everyone else is more than just wrong – they’re radicals. Her work instigates the divisions within our communities.”

It seems that some Muslims take issue with those who attempt to represent them, especially representatives who Western media deem as “safe” Muslim spokespeople. The bloggers above did not so much reject Eltahawy’s right to share her own views but they disagreed with her attempt to represent Muslims in general. The “Mouse” states,

“I strongly disagree with what you say about the niqaab and much about what you say about Islam and Muslims in general. But that doesn’t mean I’m going to threaten to kill you... What I will do is invite you over for coffee at my place, with... a warm smile that you can detect even beneath my niqaab.”

The “Mouse,” like Ahmed, does not perhaps fit the usual rendition of a cosmopolitan, but her comments convey a form of vernacular cosmopolitan praxis. The “Mouse” says, “Let’s talk over coffee,” rather than “Listen to me! I’m right.” This praxis involves vernacular cosmopolitans who remain true to their own beliefs but encourage dialogue with those who have different opinions. It encourages dialogue rather than attempting to impose beliefs on others. Ahmed, for instance, demonstrates her cosmopolitan affiliation, which is often difficult to maintain in conjunction with religious beliefs, with her statement that “if [Eltahawy] wants diversity in Islamic belief, then she has to accept my version, just like I have to accept hers.”¹³¹ This vernacular cosmopolitan praxis might have been limited to a form of Muslim cosmopolitanism if it had only circulated within

¹³⁰ <http://smpalestine.com/2011/04/11/why-mona-eltahawy-is-fundamentally-wrong/>

¹³¹ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/04/20/global-bloggers-take-issue-with-anti-niqaab-punditry/>

nodes of the digital ummah network, which I will discuss further in Chapter 5, but, since Ahmed's opinions were aired on conventional media and the Mouse's discussion was shared within transnational, rather than Muslim-oriented, cyberspaces, their messages had the more profound cosmopolitan impact of reaching the dominant transnational connective memory. Both the "Muslim Mouse" and Ahmed were able to enhance the dominant transnational connective memory through revealing that Muslim women, even those who are often framed as extremists due to their "radical" interpretations of the Qur'anic mandate on modesty, are tolerant of divergent interpretations of Islam. Their stances of openness frustrate renditions of Islam that present it as a monolith, which are badly needed to counter neo-Orientalism, and these niqabis demonstrate that Muslim women who practice more extreme interpretations of modesty do not necessarily comply with the stereotype of the cowed, voiceless Muslim woman. They actually demonstrate more tolerance than the "safe" Muslims championed in conventional media, while simultaneously challenging neo-Orientalist stereotypes.

Discussion

The voices of Muslim women expand the networked memories because, through social media outlets, they have the opportunity to share their worldviews. This chapter has demonstrated how the participation of Muslim women in social media has kept fellow Muslim women alive, immortalized in the networked memory, when they quickly disappear from conventional news sources. Sometimes the narratives are not mediated into the dominant transnational collective memory because they involve Muslim women who defy stereotypes imposed by the Western media that frame them as victims. The stories of martyred women demonstrate strength and resistance in the face of

insurmountable injustices. Some chose death rather than oppression. Others are murdered for standing up for themselves or challenging social norms. Muslim women also use social media to prevent future martyrdoms and disappearances. These social media users are not trying to achieve grandiose concessions, like the right to abortion or sexual liberations, but they do want unfettered access to the public sphere and they want the freedom to choose how they will live their lives even if their actions do not comply with social norms. They reject social conventions that limit the free movement of women, especially since their mobility is sometimes met with violence in the streets or at home. Muslims women also demand protection of their right to free religious expression but laws, which in some contexts protect their freedoms, could in other contexts contribute to disappearances, like in France where national unity is deemed as more important than individual rights.

Since their inception, social media have served as platforms for self-expression and, soon thereafter, as platforms for connections and bridges. Couldry (2008) frames “digital storytelling” as “the ability to represent the world around us – using a shared infrastructure” (p. 374). As social media networks began to connect people throughout the world, they became platforms for intercultural communication (Shuter, 2012; Chen, 2012) and spheres for cosmopolitan opportunities. The act of digital storytelling is transformative on both the transmitter’s and receptor’s ends because the former, especially if the transmitter is an Muslim women who is challenging social taboos, has engaged in subtle resistance and the latter has the option of discovering alternative narratives related to the experiences of Muslims women. The tragic deaths of Muslim women ironically provide opportunities for discussions of women’s rights without

discussing women's rights. Nearly everyone can agree that the suicide of a teenage girl, for example, is a tragedy that should be prevented so digital storytellers can provide the circumstances contributing to the suicide—in the case of Filali, legal, governmental, and familial complicity—without indicting the systemic patriarchy that gave rise to the disaster. Discussions of patriarchy, gender equality, and feminism often delegitimize claims for the extension of women's rights in Muslim communities so acts of subtle resistance have become an art form in which women tell stories with deeper underlying meanings without themselves articulating the systemic factors that contribute to the injustices.

Couldry used both the concepts of “mediatization” and “mediation” to position digital storytelling's potentially important contributions to the larger “mediascape” (Appadurai, 1996) as well as to social and political discourses. Mediatization relates to the standardization of media practice and how “real-world” events are staged to mimic media offerings, while mediation refers to the complex interplay through which messages are transmitted, received, and dispersed. Mediated messages not only alter the sender and recipient but also the medium through which the message is relayed and the larger social settings of both the sender and receiver. To use an example from a previous section, the case of Amina Filali can be employed to illustrate both concepts. Filali's suicide was ripe for “mediatization”; within months of her death two different producers were planning documentary projects to render Filali's trying life and untimely death. She had a beautiful face and, either by accident or design, activists who championed her cause used the same

photo in all the materials,¹³² including protest signs, press releases, and social media sites, so her face became easily recognizable. Although the story of her rape and suicide are somewhat contested, in regard to whether or not she was actually raped or engaged in consensual intercourse¹³³ and whether Fallaq, the rapist/husband, left her to die rather than taking her to the hospital or dragged her dying through the streets by her hair,¹³⁴ the reporting of the incidents before and after the suicide became increasingly consistent in media offerings. Furthermore, the framing of the incident was crucial to its mediatization and its mediation. If the story had been framed as the domestic abuse of a young wife rather than the rape of a minor, it would not have likely inspired much media attention locally or internationally—it was the victimization tropes and the scandalous nature of the events that became newsworthy.

The framing of Filali's story fostered the process of mediation through which it shifted from the Moroccan collective memory into the dominant transnational connective memory. Davis and Weinsbenker (2012) state that narrative framing is a crucial element of storytelling because "As we narrate, we interpret what things mean, evaluate their significance, and infer why they happened" (p. 52). They go on to say, "the narrative itself becomes a tool that shapes memory and mediates future experience" (Davis & Weinsbenker, 2012, p. 53). As such, the Moroccan courts could no longer invoke this law without remembering or being reminded of the tragic death of Filali because her narrative had become part of the collective Moroccan memory and activists moved forward with

¹³² Filali appeared to come from a poor family so it is also possible that this was the only photograph that her parents had of her.

¹³³ <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/03/17/201337.html>

¹³⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17379721>

their work remembering her sacrifice—the 16-year-old’s sacrifice became a paragon that few would emulate but many would share.

And share they did. Moroccan activists started the “We Are All Amina Filali” *Facebook* page, the #RIP Amina meme, and an online petition and the international press quickly picked up the story. Although some of the materials associated with the campaign were in French and many of the protest signs were in Arabic, as the message traveled into transnational digital spaces, materials were increasingly conveyed in English along with well-recognized shorthand, like RIP. A visualization of the #RIP Amina hashtag from the SlutWalk Morocco *Facebook* page demonstrated that this shorthand was aptly mediated as the meme trended more in France and Egypt than in Morocco. Filali became a Moroccan symbol for gender equality and legal reform and an international symbol for human rights. Although Moroccan activists were spreading awareness of the issue to expand national discourse on political and legal rights, part of the reason that the story was picked up internationally is because the event coincided with preconceptions of the experiences of Arab women as victims.

The narratives of the other martyred women were not as well mediated, starting at the national level, which appears to be the crucial vaulting point in some cases for the successful mediation of narratives into the dominant transnational connective memory. Although Laroui was the first female to self-immolate during the uprisings in the MENA region, as a woman, Moroccans had a difficult time promoting her as the face of Moroccan protests. She executed her protest the day after the widespread protests in cities across Morocco on February 20, 2011, which should have tied her suicide to the general frustration related to political rights in Morocco. Furthermore, Laroui’s last words before

she lit the accelerant were that she hoped her sacrifice would incite others to “take a stand against injustice, corruption, and tyranny.”¹³⁵ Laroui wanted her death to motivate people toward change, while it appears that Filali mainly wanted to escape the context of violent that had been forced upon her. Laroui’s tale was as tragic if not more so than Filali’s, as a homeless, single woman with children, but Laroui’s biggest problem, the one that prevented her from becoming a popular heroine among the Moroccan people, is that she did not have a husband in a context in which single motherhood could be equated with prostitution. Since the narrative of Laroui’s suicide was not widely shared locally and nationally, it had little chance of transnational mediation. The February 20 Movement attempted to promote Laroui as a symbol against tyranny but the digital materials available were mostly in Arabic and French, which perhaps limited their mediation into the dominant transnational connective memory. Tellingly, in February 2014, a Google search of the names Amina Filali and Fadwa Laroui resulted in over half a million hits and under 10,000, respectively.

Although national mediation appeared to be a critical determinant in the failed dissemination of Laroui’s narrative into the dominant transnational connective memory, the story of El Sherbini’s murder bypassed this level. Since the transnational connective memory continues to be dominated by Western gatekeepers, particularly subject coverage in international news media, narratives that do not comply with well-established beliefs about the subject’s positionality might have a difficult time being mediated at the transnational level. El-Sherbini did not fit comfortably into the stereotype of the veiled Muslim woman because she spoke out against the verbal abuse of an Islamophobe, and

¹³⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rachel-newcomb/fadwa-laroui-morocco_b_829467.html

by extension against systemic discrimination against Muslim, and was able to successfully navigate the German criminal justice system to seek justice against Wiens, her attacker. The German press stressed that Wiens was not a German but a Russian immigrant to advance the case as an incident of personal bigotry, leaving the myth of the functionality of multiculturalism intact. Notwithstanding, Western media are reluctant to actively cover cases of discrimination against Muslims unless the motives of the Muslims could be rendered as spurious, such as the case of Boudlal v. Disney in Chapter 6 in which many commenters claimed she was trying to swindle money from the company. El-Sherbini's case demonstrates the dialectic between expanding the connective memory through digital self-expression and the suppression alternative narratives by the gatekeeping of "institutionalized media" which continue to dominate the "general circulation of symbols in social life" (Silverstone, 2002, p. 762).

Although Western institutionalized media serve as a gatekeeping mechanism for the dominant transnational connective memory, there are also alternative connective memories, which, in the case of transnational Muslim networks, has been referred to as the "digital ummah," or what I call the "digital ummah network." In the case of El-Sherbini as well as other cases, like the *Jyllands-Posten* affair (Saunders, 2008; Klausen, 2009), it was not the issue itself disseminated among Muslim cyberpublics that encouraged dominant transnational mediation, but the reactions of Muslims to these incidents. Muslim cyberpublics, or nodes of the digital ummah network, variously labeled as the "Islamic Internet souq" and "public Islam," are typically analyzed through scholarly focuses on Muslim discussion boards or authoritative Islamic sites. El-Nawaway and Khamis (2010), for example, broach the "Islamic Internet souq" in terms

of the Habermasian public sphere, following Salvatore and Eickelman's (2006) "public Islam," through their study of two popular Islamic forums. However, studies such as this tend to perhaps conflate nodes with networks, particularly in invoking the "souq" through two forums and presenting them as representative of larger Muslim cyberpublics. Though the digital ummah network comes alive during debates of certain issues, particularly incidents of Islamophobia and, among Muslim women, those related to women's rights, the sphere is too fragmented to offer a detailed picture of the interactions and dialogues of Muslims online but it is possible to analyze specific snapshots, which are offered by studies like Nawaway and Khamis's (2010). In the case of the *Jyllands-Posten* affair, parts of the "public Islam" online were able to promote widespread boycotts of Danish products that were effective in impacting the economy in general (Ammitzbøll & Vidino, 2007). In the case of El-Sherbini, the lack of international coverage of the tragedy did not translate into widespread mediation in the dominant transnational connective memory, but contributed to her iconography as the "Hijab Martyr" for other Muslims who participate in the digital ummah network, particularly Egyptians who attended her funeral services in droves. It also presented another case in which discrimination against Muslims was largely ignored in Western and international news media.

The connective memory is not simply the idea of the collective memory transcribed online but it is similar to the latter in the sense that it relates to connections that individuals have with the communal past(s) (Sørensen, 2007) and because the archive is subject to gatekeeping mechanisms of the technology, similar to the corporate/state gatekeeping of conventional media. Yet it is dissimilar in regard to the sociality that underpins the connective memory. According to van Dijck (2010), the

“networked memory requires a new understanding of agency where minds and technics are intertwined” (p. 3) and “the intricate co-evolution of sociality and technicity” (p. 4). Van Dijck borrows the concept of connective memory from Hoskins (2011), who coined the phrase to describe the “devices and media, shaping an ongoing recalibration of time, space (and place) and memory by people as they connect with, inhabit and constitute increasingly both dense and diffused social networks” (p. 271). Due to the ready access of networked technology, becoming part of an alternative connective memory even actively participating in the mediation of messages through these networks becomes relatively easy, but there is no guarantee that messages circulating within these alternative spheres will translate into mediation into the dominant transnational connective memory. The perspectives of “safe Muslims” in conventional media, such as Eltahawy’s views on the niqab ban, are actually useful in regard to mediation from Muslim cyberpublics into the dominant connective memory because it is unlikely, for example, that Ahmed alone would have been invited to share her views. Thus, when Western media invite debates between “safe” Muslims and “others,” they present opportunities for Muslim cyberpublics to be integrated into the dominant connective memory.

Whether dialogue takes place on a well-known conventional media outlet, like the Eltahawy/Ahmed debate, or a blogger reflects on this debate on her blog, some theorists maintain that either intervention might serve to expand dominant transnational discourse related to Muslim women in the contemporary era. Sørensen (2007) discusses what Jansson (2002) categorizes as “communicative fabric,” following Lefevbre (2005), and how this fabric leaves marks on the spaces where it weaves together (p. 68). Therefore,

even if not all voices leave large “marks” on the dominant transnational connective memory, they do leave marks. Some of these marks involve Muslim women exhibiting the cosmopolitan praxis of positive dialogue and remaining true to their own beliefs while accepting the inherent differences of people, even divergent religious interpretations of other Muslims. The media coverage of “safe” Muslims actually provides an important cosmopolitan opportunity for oppositional Muslim voices to demonstrate the tolerance and variation of contemporary Islamic viewpoints, especially among stereotypical “extremists.” Due to this variation among Muslims, the digital ummah is a mythical space but topics like hijab discrimination, the French niqab ban, HarassMap, and so forth attract the attention of social media users from various loosely connected Muslim cyberpublics within the larger digital ummah network, demonstrating that cosmopolitan praxis does not necessarily need to include Westerners as long as interlocutors from various national contexts are conversing with one another in the spirit of cooperation and accepting difference.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted some of the efforts of Muslim women to speak up against the disappearances and, in extreme cases, martyrdoms, of their Muslim sisters. Some cases are more successfully mediated than others because of unchallenged presuppositions about the uniform victimized identity of Muslim women and due to the Western propagated model of what Muslim women should be through encounters with native informants spokespersons. Digital self-expressions that reinforce expectations of the lived experiences of Muslim women are more likely to be mediated into the dominant connective memory of cyberspaces, while stories that challenge these

preconceptions may be mediated within more localized connective memories but they may seldom move beyond them.

The next chapter analyzes divergent perspective within alternative connective memories regarding the divisive issue of spinsterhood in Muslim communities in the Arab world and the West. It will detail measures proposed by governments to reduce the increasing number of unmarried women, localized community and individual responses, and the perspectives of Muslims spinsters themselves. The social media interventions of Muslim women and Muslim spinsters suggest that part of the issue that is not alluded to in dominant discourse related to spinsterhood is women's lack of agency and communal gendered double standards, which instill women with apprehension that potential suitors will not likely treat them as equals.

Chapter 4

Women's Agency and Muslim Marriage

In a blog posting, “48Refugee,” a Palestinian woman in the United States, discusses the conflict between her dreams and the expectations of potential suitors.¹³⁶ She looks forward to her 25th birthday, even though she has been taught to fear it her whole life, because she is tired of apologizing for whom she is to make herself more appealing to men. She would prefer to use her talents to contribute to her community rather than be coerced into quitting her job to have a “half-dozen kids.” She says that people make her feel like a “freak” for wanting to use “the blessings God has given [her]...to serve Him, before serving” her prospective husband. “48Refugee” hopes that now that her pool of prospective suitors is limited to men over 30, due to her “advanced” age, they will be less likely to be looking for “just-out-of-high-school, baby-making, live-in maids...a younger, hotter version of their mother” and more likely to realize that intelligent women are not a threat to their manhood and have as much to offer “to the world and God as men do.” She decides to celebrate her 25-year-old spinsterhood instead of perceiving it as a personal failure. She emphasizes her worth as a human being, “independent of the roles of mother and wife” that her community attempts to force upon her. “48Refugee” is stating that her decision to delay marriage so that she can use her talents toward the betterment of her community should not be understood as a personal flaw but as a rejection of the judgment of women, based on their compliance with social norms and their procreative promise, and a choice that is partially due to the lack of suitors who will see her as their equal rather than their maid.

¹³⁶ <http://48refugee.blogspot.com/2013/01/celebrating-spinsterhood.html>

“48 Refugee’s” narrative highlights several issues related to spinsterhood from the perspective of Muslim women that will be addressed in this chapter. There is very little scholarly literature on the trend of spinsterhood within Muslim communities. Significantly, the query “Muslim spinster” only yielded two results on Google Scholar in January of 2013. The topic is theorized indirectly by scholars in discussions of women’s rights and forms of women’s activism (Tohidi, 1998) and in articles related to the agency of Muslim women (Mahmood, 2001; Ong, 1990), which is central to the theoretical framework broached in this chapter’s “Discussion.” In what follows, I will attempt to address the question of how different Muslims from various social positions frame the issue of spinsterhood and their proposed solutions for countering its increasing prevalence. This chapter will demonstrate not only the variance of Muslim communities but also how Muslim spinsters have used social media to advance countersentences to dominant discourses related to spinsterhood.

The proposed solutions to what has been marked by governments and media in the Arab world as a “crisis”—government grants, an imposed ceiling on mahr (the “bride price,” or the financial responsibility that a man pledges to his prospective wife in the marriage contract), temporary marriages (*misyar*), initiatives to prevent marriages between nationals and foreign women, and polygyny (related to the disputed Qur’anic permissibility of marrying up to four women)—do not largely benefit women, although polygyny has become a collective/individual response to the perceived lack of available men in some contexts. Some Muslim women view spinsterhood as an empowered choice and resent the social stigma that they face for remaining unmarried. These spinsters tend to suggest that the problem lies in the shortcomings of their suitors rather than in their

own character flaws. I piece together discussions from several datasets to demonstrate how spinsterhood could be seen as a form of subtle resistance to the following: the obsession with female virginity, the limitations on women's agency, the pervasive gendered double standards in Muslim communities, and violence against women that diminishes their desire to form relationships with men.

This section has introduced different perspectives on Muslim spinsterhood and how the proposed solutions in dominant discourse do not tend to favor women or address why Muslim women might want to delay marriage or not marry at all. The next section will discuss how the internet has been “domesticated” or “cultured” to facilitate marriage and other religious obligations.

Social Media as Spiritual Technologies

Marriage is often considered a religious obligation for Muslims (Situmorang, 2007; Ghaffar & Shenaz, 2010) and, as such, the internet is sometimes employed to facilitate this important socio-religious duty, though its use toward this end is contested among Muslims. Some use the internet to engage in “halal dating,” which is related to prospective spouses becoming acquainted online. Others use it to find prospective spouses in contexts in which traditional circuits for matchmaking are diminished (Piela, 2011). Although some scholars theorize that the internet is acting upon religion, particularly hierarchies of ecumenical knowledge, Campbell (2005) discusses how religious people are acting upon the technology through its “domestication.” She claims, “technology is cultured by the culture in which it lives and by the agents who utilize it” (Campbell, 2005, p. 3). Thus, while within non-religious communities, social media users might use the internet to “hook up,” people from religious communities may use it to find

prospective marriage partners. Piela (2011) finds that British Muslim women on Muslim dating websites stipulate that they are only interested in meeting men who are serious about marriage, no “players” or men who are already married or in relationships. Beyond that these women also map out the type of marriages they want—partnerships—and whom they consider to be “‘Islamically suitable’ partners”—no “mummies boy[s]” or “cultural Muslims.” Some of these Muslim women articulate that they would rather remain single than marry into a subservience positions vis-à-vis their husbands.

Traditional religious groups sometimes divide aspects of contemporary living into the categories of “sacred” and “profane” and internet technologies are occasionally associated with “profane” modernity. Thus some Muslims who wish to utilize this profane technology are faced with the task of domesticating it toward expressions that comply with their religious cultures. As I will discuss below, Muslims who oppose gender mixing online etch out ways that Muslim men and women can appropriately interact within cyberspaces, which can be seen as a way of making the profane more sacred. Muslim women are also advised by some interlocutors who attempt to influence the technology toward the sacred to police each other’s internet use, which has led some female bloggers, like “Fadi 7aki,” to complain that social media serve to reinforce offline social norms and gendered double standards. Other women, such as Reem Asaad, substantiate the theory of “cultured technology” (Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005), arguing that the internet has allowed women to shape the technology, in the Saudi context, for example, by engaging in social interaction while remaining “physically invisible.” For Asaad, “cultured technology” is not necessarily a process of spiritualization but an instrument that serves to extend the public sphere, at least virtual one. Muslim women

can also “culture” their social media use toward more extreme forms of resistance, while remaining physically invisible, in contexts in which their mobility in the physical public sphere is limited. Later in this chapter, I argue that more extreme “invisible” forms of resistance enacted in cyberspaces are tied to Muslim women’s lack of agency (Tohidi 1991, 2002; Mahmood 2001) but, although they are extreme forms of resistance in the spaces in which they are played out, they remain “subtle” due to their invisibility.

Campbell (2005) also notes some general trends in internet use toward the promotion of religion both on and offline. One of these trends is the iterative development of “religious identity,” which she conceptualizes as “individuals [who] subscribe to common beliefs based on specific religious tradition lived out through public rituals” (p. 18). Her focus on practices is germane to Muslims who may not qualify their own Muslim identity but they may demarcate typologies of Muslimness based on others’ Islamic “public rituals” (or outward expressions of faith), which I will discuss further in the Chapter 5. Using social media to develop religious identity can be seen as expanding the Habermasian public sphere, which has often been framed as secular because “to root political participation in civic virtue is to impose a demand on the citizen that necessarily restricts his or her individual freedom” (Hirschkind, 2001, p. 4). However, Hirschkind (2001) recognizes that the public sphere theorized by Habermas was never free from the influence of Christianity. Likewise, Campbell (2005) notes, “religion still plays a key role in the social construction of cultural spaces” (p. 5). Hence, despite the norm in secular societies to cast publics as non-religious political spheres, “private” religion, as an important element of political and cultural formations, continues to weigh in on “public” politics. Feminist theorists have also argued that public and private is a false dichotomy

(Elshtain 1982), which will be demonstrated by this chapter's linkages between gender inequality in on and offline "public" spheres and its effects on the family in the "private" sphere. As I discussed in the Chapter 3, cyberpublics can be expanded to accommodate voices that are absent from the physical public sphere but this accommodation also implies that these voices are positioned outside of dominant discourses. This chapter will outline how the internet can be domesticated to serve as a tool for countering dominant discourses and advancing counterclaims related to the rights of Muslim women and their access to the public spheres, as forms of resistance that are sometimes proscribed in physical public spheres, as exemplified by the resistance of spinsters to ostracism and women's rejection of victim-blaming associated with sexual harassment.

Some women use the spaces created by this "cultured technology" to assert their God-given rights to access public spheres and to equal, rather than subordinated, positions in the family. Moghadam and Sadiqi (2006) argue, "Women's strategic use of media as a means of access to the public sphere transforms and feminizes both" (p. 3). They do not specifically mention online media but a few of the blog postings well illustrate the efforts of Muslim women to transform public spheres toward their equal inclusion and feminize the patriarchal family. "48Refugee," for example, cites her desire to use her "God-given" talents to contribute to her community in ways other than keeping a home and having children. Other Muslim women, like Hina Khan, reference the intention of the Qur'an rather than its verbatim passages to argue against the modern-day practice of polygyny, claiming their right to disagree with the Qur'anic hermeneutics of traditional male scholars. Online discussions in the HarassMap dataset assert that Egyptian women have earned their equal access to the physical public sphere through

their God-given rights and their participation in the revolution. These Egyptian women also reject social norms that excuse men's actions based on the common belief that men cannot control themselves—"God made them that way." Muslim women are feminizing social media, and by extension online and offline public spheres, through demanding that men treat them as equals.

This section has discussed how social media are cultured to facilitate religious obligations, such as marriage, promote religious interventions in "public" spheres, and exercise subtle, yet in some cases extreme, forms of resistance against hierarchical configurations of public spaces. The next several sections will present examples of how social media have been cultured to offer counterclaims to dominant discourse on spinsterhood in contexts in which female access to public spheres is contested. While dominant discourse renders the high and growing number of unmarried women as a "crisis," the counterclaims offered by some Muslim women suggest that, although many of them view marriage as an important social institution, the proposed solutions offered in dominant discourses would not address their concerns regarding the type of marriage to which they would commit themselves.

Governmental Responses to Spinsterhood

Based on the Muslim spinster dataset, spinsterhood has been framed as a "crisis" by governments and online news sources throughout the Arab world.¹³⁷ Spinsterhood

¹³⁷ According to *Middle East Online*, 60% of women over 30 in the UAE are single: <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53150>. Another article lists the numbers of spinsters in various MENA countries: Egypt (nine million), Algeria (four million), Iraq (three million), and Yemen (two million) as the countries. Although Morocco, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia all have about 1.5 million spinsters, in Saudi Arabia, this figure makes up 30 percent of the women of marriageable ages, the same percentage of unmarried women in Yemen and Libya. Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and UAE have percentages of 35%: <http://www.emirates247.com/news/region/saudi-arabia-warned-of-women-explosion-2011-12-18-1.433275>.

would not be of such grave concern were there not an implicit “expiration date” on the age of marriageable women—a woman’s choices of prospective husbands greatly diminishes by the time she reaches 25 and by the age of 30 her chances of getting a marriage proposal are nearly nil. Online news commentators suggest various reasons for the rise in the number of spinsters. In the Gulf region, some articles blame men who choose to marry foreign brides¹³⁸ along with prohibitions on marriages between Gulf women and Muslim and non-Muslim men of other nationalities.¹³⁹ Some articles and social media interlocutors claim that the greed of women and their families, related to the trend of demanding exorbitant *mahr* (bride prices), is to blame for the growing incidence of spinsterhood. Other commentators blamed women for putting off marriage to pursue their education and/or careers. The problem perhaps is not so much that a substantial proportion of the population of marriageable women is unmarried but that Saudi men, for example, are not marrying Saudi women and creating Saudi babies. In countries with slight populations, like the population of Emiratis in the UAE that stands at less than 1 million, if Emirati men and women do not have children, the culture is likely to evolve into something else. While some might not consider cultural evolution to be tragic, it could disrupt the status quo that allows the establishment to maintain its power (Nahas, 1985; Mach, 1993). Thus, taking measures to ensure that the population maintains cultural homogeneity through nationals marrying other nationals plays a part in reinforcing existing power structures. Furthermore, families, communities, and governments all have their motivations for encouraging women to marry, and women

¹³⁸ For example, in 2010, 30% of the marriages performed in the UAE were between Emirati men and non-Emirati women.

¹³⁹ <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/society/rise-in-number-of-spinsters-as-emiratis-marry-foreigners-1.672200>

have their own reasons for remaining single, so this issue demonstrates a variety of Muslim perspectives as well as dominant discourses and counterclaims.

Due to the “crisis” incidence of spinsterhood in the Gulf, some governments have proposed measures to counter the growing number of unwed women, which have mainly addressed the principal complaint of prospective grooms—the high cost of getting married. The Emirati government has instituted a ceiling on what a bride’s family can request in mahr, although families do still ask for more than the \$14,000 ceiling imposed by the government.¹⁴⁰ The Emirati government has also offered \$19,000 to men for their first marriage to ameliorate the expense of getting married; it only offers funds for a second wife if the first is unable to conceive.¹⁴¹ The Kuwaiti government has approved a proposal to give loans to men who marry spinsters, divorcées, and widows¹⁴² and it has attempted to prevent Kuwaiti men from marrying foreigners by imposing a law that stipulates that foreign women married to local men must attain governmental approval to live in Kuwait.¹⁴³ The UAE has passed a similar measure to prevent marriages between nationals and foreign women by refusing to issue visas to women under 40 unless a male relative accompanies them.¹⁴⁴ The Saudi government also blocks marriages between Saudi men and foreign women.¹⁴⁵ The Bahraini government, particularly religious authorities, has encouraged men and women to embrace polygyny, which is true of other Gulf officials as well.

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53150>

¹⁴¹ <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53150>

¹⁴² <http://www.arabtimesonline.com/NewsDetails/tabid/96/smid/414/ArticleID/169617/refTab/56/Default.aspx>

¹⁴³ http://expatandthecity.blogspot.com/2013/01/being-american-gold-digger-in-kuwait.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+ExpatAndTheCityKuwait+%28Expat+and+the+City+%7E+Kuwait%29

¹⁴⁴ <http://www.economist.com/node/486762>

¹⁴⁵ <http://xrdarabia.org/2011/01/22/looking-at-saudi-marriage/>

This section has outlined how spinsterhood is framed in dominant governmental and media discourses. The next section will discuss individual and collective responses to the growing trend of spinsterhood as well as examples of social media users gathering in cyberspaces to expand public spheres through advancing counterclaims to these dominant discourses, particularly the promotion of polygyny.

Collective/Individual Responses

Social media users did not so much appear to care about the growing rates of spinsterhood as they did about government officials' encouragement of polygyny, which some viewed as socially regressive. Sarah Alaoiu, a Bahraini blogger, cites the stir that Sheikh Jasem Al Saidi created in the Bahraini blogosphere for encouraging men to marry four wives to reduce the number of spinsters in the country. Alaoiu advises Al Saidi to return to his cave.¹⁴⁶ "SoulSearch," another female Bahraini blogger, writes, "Women don't need men like you to live a dignified life, women are more resilient, more determined, more empowered to live an independent way of life, and don't need cavemen like you to marry them."¹⁴⁷ One of the commenters on "SoulSearch," "Think Pink," a transgender female, recognizes Al Saidi as the same governmental official who had previously called for the segregation of schools and suggests that Bahraini bloggers vote him onto the French television program "Just For Laughs." Another interlocutor, "Bahraini and proud," suggests that this could be the start of a long entourage of regressions including the following: leaving houses for tents, banning computers (as a satanic, Western technology), and riding horses instead of bicycles. "Doe14" questions why members of the government are attempting to interfere in issues that s/he believes to

¹⁴⁶ <http://sarahalaoui.blogspot.com/2009/07/all-boxed-in.html>

¹⁴⁷ <http://soulsearch78.blogspot.com/2007/04/saidism.html>

be outside of their purview, which is representative of several comments on this thread, suggesting instead that officials could better serve the populace through addressing the dilapidated state of infrastructure and operation of Bahraini cities. These comments implied that Bahraini netizens believe that operational cities are more of a function of the government than interfering in the private lives of Bahraini citizens. Although Bahraini social media users appear to find the promotion of polygyny anti-modern, it is likely that government officials proposed polygyny to maintain status quo through bolstering cultural homogeneity. This discussion not only highlights the polarized views on contemporary Muslimness, but also how the practice of Islam propagated by Muslims in positions of power does not always reflect that of average Muslims whom they ostensibly represent.

What if Muslim women opt to become second-wives of their own volition? Should this choice be equally rejected, as it was by the Bahraini social media users? A blog posting on *A Big Message for an Upside Down World*¹⁴⁸ discusses an article in the *Daily Mail*¹⁴⁹ about some Muslim women in the United Kingdom who have proactively sought to become second wives, perhaps to avoid the spinster label, through contracting matchmakers to find them interested potential married husbands. The matchmaker, mentioned in this blog posting by “nury,” says that he has received hundreds of requests from women who want to become second wives. “nury” claims that British Muslim women have had difficulty marrying because they “find themselves between two cultures.” They are not keen to agree to arranged marriages but they also reject typical

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.abigmessage.com/uk-has-muslim-spinster-crisis.html>

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2113366/Muslim-women-share-husbands-lack-suitable-men.html>

Western-style engagements involving cohabitation. The number of available men also contributes to the problematic; for example, the matchmaker referenced above claims that women outnumber men five to one at social events to meet potential spouses. “nuryñ” suggests two reasons that women so starkly outnumber available men: first, the success of the woman substantially reduces the number of prospective mates who are her equals in terms of intellect and earning potential and it hinders her appeal to available Muslim men; and, second, parents encourage their sons to “import” brides because these “culturally authentic” women are perceived to be more likely to stay home and look after them as they age. Thus some parents encourage cultural stasis through the opposite means that governments in the Gulf address it; rather than blocking the entrance of foreign brides, they promote it.

Hina Khan, a Pakistani Londoner blogging at *Simply, Hinoo*, broaches the same *Daily Mail* article on her blog.¹⁵⁰ Khan takes up the controversial stance that polygyny is an unacceptable modern-day Islamic practice because the circumstances that gave rise to its permissibility in the Qur’an no longer hold true. Khan suggests that it is not so much the scarce availability of Muslim men that has contributed to this trend but, to the contrary, it is the priorities of career-minded Muslim women that lessen the appeal of becoming first wives. First wives are expected to manage the home first and foremost and, since it is clearly difficult for women to juggle their career aspirations and their household obligations, many women are forced to choose between one and the other. This is a difficult choice for women who are inclined to favor the former and view the latter as an inconvenience that hinders their potential. As Khan states, “a hectic day at

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2113366/Muslim-women-share-husbands-lack-suitable-men.html>

work is more important [to them] than cooking.” As a result, the priorities of Muslim career women come into conflict with what appeals to potential spouses. Khan also claims that the only Muslim men who would consider marrying career women are those who already have “someone at home doing the wifey stuff,” although, Khan believes, adding the career-oriented second wife creates an imbalance in the relationship between the husband and the wife “doing wifey stuff.” Khan speculates that the first wife would become a maid for both her husband and the second wife, allowing the second wife to sidestep domestic responsibilities and focus on her career, while the second wife has the leisure time to act as a companion and intellectual muse for their husband. She characterizes the second wife’s position in the threesome as a “part time” relationship, akin to being a mistress.

Khan and the commenters on her blog also collectively attempt to situate why the Qur’an allowed polygyny and whether or not the stipulations related to its permissibility still apply in the current era. Khan believes that the Qur’anic imperative to treat multiple wives equally creates a “catch-22” because, she opines, not even mothers are capable of treating their children in a precisely egalitarian fashion. “qrratugai” reinforces Khan’s assertion with Qur’anic verse 4:129: “You cannot be just and fair to your wives, even if it is your ardent desire.” “Utmani” agrees that men cannot treat multiple wives equally. He also claims that the permissibility of polygyny was granted by the Qur’an to address a crisis—the “welfare of orphans”—and, in the modern age, it is illegitimate because men are not marrying women to help care for their children. “Utmani” goes on to say that a few Muslim countries, such as Tunisia and Turkey, have banned polygyny because “they believe in IJTEHAD.” *Ijtihad* is “the power to interpret the revealed text” (Cesari, 2008),

which is a practice that has historically been limited to the hermeneutics of popularly recognized male scholars. “Utmani” is perhaps referring to *ijtihad*, in this case, as policymakers moving away from traditional interpretations of the Qur’an that also stipulate that the gates of *ijtihad* were closed in the 4th or 7th century of the hijra (the 10th or 13th century CE) (Hallaq, 1984), meaning that Muslims who consume traditional religious knowledge do not feel that anyone after the 4th or 7th century of hijra has the power to interpret the Islamic scriptures.

Khan recognizes that the practice of *ijtihad* is disputed among modern-day Muslims, which she classifies as “another debate...[between] “practising” Muslims and “liberal” Muslims.” Counterparts perhaps associated with the “practising” typology of Muslims also commented on her blog. “HUtopian” claims that polygyny is perfectly inline with modern day Islamic practices but “westernized feminism,” which accepts “single, never married mothers” but rejects “a legitimate relation allowed in Islam,” has disrupted tolerance of polygyny. “HUtopian” also claims that Khan, “Utmani,” and “qrratugai,” are distorting Islam, or introducing *bid’ah* (heretical religious innovation), to support their personal views. “Anonymous” agrees with “HUtopian,” stating, “there's no need to call someone else's lifestyle disgusting. It may not work for you but it may work for them.” This commenter claims that it is hypocritical to accept adultery but deny an Islamically sanctioned *nikah* (religious marriage) between two people, which, to be fair, the “liberal” camp, including Khan and her supporters, never suggests is acceptable. This anonymous commenter also rejects the idea of *ijtihad*, retorting, “let us stop trying to be jurists.” S/he goes on to say, “When you think you can interpret the quran on your own, it becomes extremis[t] in my opinion,” offering the examples of Irshad Manji and Osama

Bin Laden, whom s/he believes have advanced their own interpretations of the Qur'an toward the destabilization of Islam and the weakening of the rhetorical *ummah*. Most readers will immediately identify the latter, Bin Laden, but the former is also quite well known in some social media networks as a Muslim lesbian who believes that her sexuality does not conflict with the tenets of Islam, which I will discuss further in Chapter 5. Thus, "Anonymous" posits that both the extremes of the fundamentalist political Islam and "liberal" Islam are contradictory to and weakening the faith. However, it is a stretch to lump Muslims who disagree with the practice of the polygyny into the same "liberal Muslim" camp with Manji as even Muslims who accept that polygyny is permissible in Islam in modern times may not themselves believe that it is a practice in which they would want to participate and fewer still might believe that queerness is permissible in Islam. "qrratugai" rebukes the statement of the anonymous commenter, writing,

I acknowledge...the mainstream interpretation of Qur'anc [sic] verses pertinent to women, but I do not support most of them as they ultimate demean me, subjugate me ... there's a huge difference between the Word of my God and the words of scholars...their opinions...are just that – opinions...Not one of the interpreters was ever [a] woman, and few seem to realize the problem with this! Imagine a group of men making decisions FOR me, deciding what "Islam" says "about" me...I'd like to read the text for myself, study it for myself, and understand it for myself, all the while surveying the various *different* conclusions made about women by men scholars of Islam who saw the dower (mahr) as "the price of the vulva."

In this comment "qrratugai" also references her credential as a doctoral student in Islamic Studies. She avers, as many female Muslim scholars have done (Wadud, 1999; Mernissi, 1991; Barlas, 2002; Barazangi, 2004; Ali, 2008), that it is her right as a Muslim woman to engage in hermeneutics and offer a female interpretation of the Qur'an. Perhaps she believes that if more people engaged in *ijtihad* they would agree that the permissibility of polygyny in the Qur'an is not a blanket acceptance of the practice.

Shifting from the United Kingdom back to the Arab world, not only polygyny but also the practice of *misyar* marriages has become more prevalent due to the large number of unwed women. These marriages, like the requests of British women to become second wives, may be likewise recognized as a collective/individual response to the high number of spinsters but this type of marriage is equally controversial. The *Crossroads Arabia*¹⁵¹ and *Susie's Big Adventures*¹⁵² blogs both mention the increase in *misyar* marriages and the trend of taking second wives without the consent of the first wives. These arrangements allow men and women to legally engage in sexual relations, in countries in which fornication prosecutions result in corporeal punishment, but *misyar* husbands are not in any way obligated to their *misyar* wives, financially or otherwise. The couple in a *misyar* marriage lives in separate households and may only see one another for a week or two per year, so perhaps the only benefit to women is to detangle them from the title of spinster. "Susie" says that she personally knows of five families in which the husbands took second wives and, in all of these cases, the men did so secretly without having informed their first wives and the children from their first marriages. Susie states that the first families were devastated when they found out about the second wives.

Most of the commenters on "Susie of Arabia's" posting were against polygyny and *misyar* marriage but "Omani Princess" says,

"I am totally okay with my husband marrying a second wife (with my full knowledge and respect for my feelings...) or with BEING a second [*sic*] wife if the first wife is not going to be hurt by it. Islam allows it for a reason. But too many women AND men abuse it."¹⁵³

"Omani Princess" is qualifying the practice rather than stating that polygyny is actually not Islamic, such as marrying a second wife to "upgrade...[the first wife] with a younger

¹⁵¹ <http://xrdarabia.org/2011/01/22/looking-at-saudi-marriage/>

¹⁵² <http://susiesbigadventure.blogspot.com/2010/07/spinsters-in-saudi-arabia.html>

¹⁵³ <http://susiesbigadventure.blogspot.com/2010/07/spinsters-in-saudi-arabia.html>

model” as “Aafke-Art” states, or Islamic without exception. In her comment she also includes links to a few blog posts that she has written on the subject. “Omani Princess” starts by saying that polygyny is abused for “prestige and sex”¹⁵⁴ but most of her first posting is another blogger’s—“Pixie,” blogging at *Beautiful Muslimah*—rationale for accepting polygyny.¹⁵⁵ “Pixie” stresses that a man should only marry more than one wife if he can physically, mentally, and spiritually treat the wives equally and the only women who should be considered as potential second wives are orphans, unmarried reverts, divorced women without families, and women with little or no financial support. “Pixie” claims that treating orphans fairly means that a man should marry them to prevent himself “from taking advantage of them or doing things improper.” Other interpretations of this verse (4:3) claim that treating orphans fairly is more of a fiduciary concern related to absconding the wealth of orphans (Wadud, 1999) so “Pixie’s” interpretation actual counters “Omani Princess’s” earlier statement that marrying a second wife for sex is an abuse of the practice. “Pixie” ends her posting with a description of a polygynous family that was “done correctly” to demonstrate that it is possible. In this arrangement, the first wife and third wife, who was a divorcée from an abusive family, were close in age and the second wife, a widow who was thirty years older than the husband, served as a mother figure to the other wives. The three wives were close friends. This example does appear to comply with the stipulations that “Pixie” mentioned above, demonstrating that genuinely Islamic forms of polygyny are possible though perhaps rare.

In the second posting, “Omani Princess” emphasizes the importance of the first wife’s consent to the second marriage by sharing a touching letter that a prospective

¹⁵⁴ <http://howtolivelikeanomaniprincess.blogspot.com/2009/12/all-these-posts-about-second-wives.html>

¹⁵⁵ <http://ilovehishmatheblog.blogspot.com/2009/08/when-would-i-consider-this-second-wife.html>

second wife sent to the first wife.¹⁵⁶ The posting situates the appropriate practice of polygyny as a communal rather than personal undertaking through encouraging potential second wives to secure the permission of the first wife. However, she also makes an inflammatory remark by placing the blame for the first wife's emotional distress, due to her husband marrying a second wife without her consent, squarely on the shoulders of the second wife because the husband "is just a man." However, the Qur'an says nothing about the second wife's obligations to the first wife other than perhaps the dictates of the common decency that Muslims should demonstrate to one another. It is the husband who is commanded by the Qur'an to treat his wives with fairness but the prospective second wife has made no such commitment to the first wife. Certainly, the first wife should have the opportunity to consent or object to the second-wife marriage but "Omani Princess" takes up the tenuous position that women should once again bear the onus of men's misdeeds because "he is just a man." Her statement also mimics the excuses that Egyptian men and women use to justify violence against women in the streets in the HarassMap dataset; that is, men cannot control themselves so women bear the burden of protecting themselves. "Just being a man" then becomes a catchall for stupidity, violence, and oppression.

Despite "Omani Princess's" incendiary remarks, both she and "Pixie" are attempting to contribute to basic standards of comportment, including the following: first wives should have the opportunity to consent or not to their husbands marrying second wives and potential second wives should be limited to women whom may need financial, social, and emotional support. This is a form of cosmopolitan praxis in that "Omani

¹⁵⁶ <http://howtolivelikeanomaniprincess.blogspot.com/2010/07/letter-from-other-woman-to-first-wife.html>

Princess” and “Pixie” do not believe that polygyny is universally acceptable but they are suggesting certain basic standards through which it can be practiced in an Islamic manner. If the practice of polygyny were limited to Muslim countries, this praxis might be considered a form Muslim cosmopolitanism but, since it is practiced throughout the world it, these standards could apply to polygynous relationships elsewhere as well.

There is a myriad of proposed “solutions” to the spinsterhood dilemma, which demonstrates extraordinary variance among those who consider themselves Muslims. These solutions vary based on geography (for example, the legality of proposed solutions in various contexts), culture, local communities, and families but they generally do not appear to be beneficial to women, unless a woman is eager to become second wives even though her polygynous family may face the disdain of the larger society and other Muslims who disagree with the practice. Reducing mahr leaves women vulnerable in the event that their husbands divorce them. Imposing measures to prevent Gulf men from marrying foreigners, may coerce men into marrying local women but, if one of these men is in love with a foreign woman, how will he treat the local woman that he is forced to marry instead? Although some governmental initiatives stipulate that funds to encourage marriage are only granted to men for their first marriages, giving men money to ameliorate the costs of marriage or encouraging them to take multiple wives does not necessarily signify that they will marry spinsters. Many men may continue to draw from the pool of more attractive (read: younger) prospective brides, described by “Refugee 48” as women in their late teens/early twenties who lack college educations and/or career aspirations. Nonetheless, these measures may encourage men and women to marry if they

really want to or if they really do not want to be branded as spinsters, but others may prefer to remain unmarried, which I will discuss in the next section.

This section has highlighted various perspectives on polygyny, one of the solutions that government officials have advanced to counter the growing number of unmarried women in the Gulf region and a communal/individual response to the perceived lack of available men in some Western Muslim communities. In Bahrain, some commenters framed polygyny as an anti-modern proposition, countering dominant discourse that it is an acceptable solution to the issue of spinsterhood. In the United Kingdom, some women were embracing polygyny as an organic response to reconciling their desires to have careers and families. Some commenters argued that polygyny is one of many “solutions” that do not benefit women, while others claimed that it might be an acceptable option if it is arranged in the proper way. Although some women have chosen to become second wives, polygyny remains contested within Muslim communities. The next section will highlight the perspectives of some of the unmarried women whom everyone is interested in “fixing,” in Egypt, where spinsterhood has become somewhat of a movement.

Responses of Spinsters

Some Muslim women do not see spinsterhood as a “crisis”; they see it as their right. Some, like the ones pursuing their education or careers, choose to delay marriage and object to being stigmatized by their respective communities. *Global Voices Online* showcased the blog postings of some Egyptian spinsters who have been attempting to destigmatize spinsterhood,¹⁵⁷ starting with “Khokha’s” who blogs at *The daily diaries of*

¹⁵⁷ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/12/20/egyptian-spinsters/>

a sinister spinster. Says “Khokha,” “There was a time when every time I opened my mouth or voiced an opinion, they would look at me and say “ah ... yes ... she is a jealous sinister.”¹⁵⁸ This passage characterizes a common reaction to spinsters; they are silenced by their status in society. The principal responsibility of Muslim women within their communities is to marry and have babies and, if they fail to do so, they are often considered outcasts and judged as having irremediable character flaws that have contributed to their pathetic inability to attract a man. They are not considered full participants in their communities because their failure to marry is often deemed as contrary to Islam. Although Reynold and Wetherell (2004) cast singleness as a “troubled category” (as cited in Piela 2011), some spinsters are attempting to recast it in an empowered sense. For example, Abeer Soliman, blogging at *The Journal of a Spinster*, writes, “we managed to nail down a few common factors that lead to our “miserable” situation. Independence, success, and brains were our stigma for we live in a society where the smart successful independent woman attracts and challenges the man.”¹⁵⁹ She goes on to say that their blessings are curses when it comes to marriage because Middle Eastern men are simultaneously attracted to and repelled by successful women. Soliman claims, since Middle Eastern men, the “Alfa male,” needs “the upper hand, the better job, the bigger income,” women who refuse to position themselves as subordinate to them remain unmarried and become social enigmas.

Another spinster, 27-year-old Egyptian Youma Mokhtar, formed a *Facebook* group in 2008 called “Spinster/Old Maids for Change*,” which attracted about 600 followers by the end of 2008. Mokhtar’s group gained national and international media

¹⁵⁸ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/12/20/egyptian-spinsters/>

¹⁵⁹ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/12/20/egyptian-spinsters/>

attention, most likely because the stigma attached to spinsterhood is somewhat universal.

According to a *Muslimah Media Watch* article, its mission statement is the following:

[to change] the negative attitude towards every unmarried girl who finds herself facing two dead ends: either forced to get married to any man so she can get rid of the ‘spinster’ title that’s suffocating her, or maintaining her position, insisting on waiting until she finds the right guy and [in the meantime] dealing with the curses that society will throw at her.¹⁶⁰

This statement suggests that women may be coerced into marrying *any* guy, not because they want to, but to avoid the distain of the larger community. Mokhtar claims that one of the goals of the group is to prevent the social isolation of women by encouraging them to make “the world a better place...not only through marriage and producing babies, but in improving...[their] community through the abilities God gave...[them],” reminiscent of “48Refugee’s” statement at the beginning of the chapter. Both “48Refugee” and Mokhtar are advancing their right to be appreciated as equal members of their communities, whether or not they contribute to it in the conventional sense by having babies.

When Mokhtar was interviewed for an Egyptian forum, she was asked several loaded questions as to whether or not her group is promoting the rejection of marriage and to comment on the bad behavior of certain spinsters, which, the interviewer suggests, has given all spinsters bad reputations. To the last question, she replied,

Your question encapsulates exactly the view of society towards women whose marriage date was delayed, who look at her as the girl with a bad reputation, and this is the viewpoint we are fighting against. Especially since a lot of [unmarried] women [...] hold the highest educational degrees and the highest positions. But no, society begrudges them their success and considers it a way of compensating for delaying marriage.¹⁶¹

The interviewer is clearly articulating the prevalent perceptions of the society; that is, spinsters are attempting to subvert the foundational institution of marriage and shrug off social norms of propriety. The social preconception of an unmarried woman’s “bad

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mmw/2008/12/egyptian-spinsters-and-old-maids-sitting-happily-on-the-shelf/>

¹⁶¹ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/12/20/egyptian-spinsters/>

reputation” assumes that, if she has not married by 25 years of age, she must have engaged in sexual impropriety, which is perhaps connected to the equally pervasive stereotype that educated, successful women are “liberated,” shrinking away from tradition, so societal status quo pushes back, bullying them with the spinster label.

Due to the belief that unmarried women are “liberated” and morally ambivalent and challenging social norms by refusing to get married by their “deadlines,” they must constantly defend their actions. To this end, Mokhtar posted the following comment on the group’s *Facebook* page:

We aren’t seeking to make men enemies...nor are we calling on girls to boycott marriage. But we reject the idea that girls should get married under pressure from their families or societies or just to get rid of the title ‘spinster,’ [so they do not] come back to their families...carrying the label ‘divorcée.’¹⁶²

In the quote above, Mokhtar is denying accusations that spinsters are attempting to undermine the institution of marriage and the stereotype that spinsters are feminists and, by extension, avid man-haters who promote female supremacy, a subject to which I will return in relation to SlutWalk Morocco in Chapter 6. However, the resistance of women to social norms, such as marriage, or more specifically to marrying *any* man, is often framed in terms of “radical” feminism—their push for small concessions, such as universal rejection of sexual harassment, is embellished to the point that their demands would ultimately lead to the downfall of conventional familial and societal relations and result in the moral bankruptcy that is believed to have become standard in Western countries.

Mokhtar’s quote above also highlights another important issue; that is, divorcées are also stigmatized. Several articles discuss the growing divorce rates of several

¹⁶² <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mmw/2008/12/egyptian-spinsters-and-old-maids-sitting-happily-on-the-shelf/>

Muslim-majority countries, especially in Gulf countries, among which Saudi Arabia has the highest divorce rate,¹⁶³ perhaps because some women are marrying any man to avoid the “spinster” label or because men and women are not able to get acquainted prior to marriage due to the legal sanctions against gender mixing, as the techno-ikhtilat dataset suggests. Other articles discuss greedy Saudi fathers asking for high bride prices in order to settle debts,¹⁶⁴ thus, being that fathers are sometimes arranging marriages based on the suitors’ finances rather than the couple’s compatibility, this could be a contributing factor to the increase in divorces. The escalating rates of divorce could also fuel women’s apprehension of accepting the first marriage proposal they receive, deciding instead to wait for more promising suitors but, as time passes and more of the suitors’ expectations are consistent, women decide in favor of the first stigmatized label, spinster, to avoid the other one, divorcée.

A *Muslimah Media Watch* posting takes up the international news coverage of Mokhtar’s group. The Egyptian author, Ethat ElKatatney, begins the piece with the statement, “I am a 21-year-old spinster.”¹⁶⁵ She discusses the familial and social pressures women face to marry: “unmarried women are (alternatively) rejected, stigmatized, mocked, gossiped about, pitied and constantly reminded of what they’re missing out on.”¹⁶⁶ ElKatatney offers a few proverbs, like “Better a man’s shadow than

¹⁶³ <http://www.emirates247.com/news/region/saudi-arabia-warned-of-women-explosion-2011-12-18-1.433275>. According to another 2009 article, nearly one in every three Saudi marriages ends in divorce: <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar/213841-25m-arab-women-%E2%80%98unmarried%E2%80%99.html>.

¹⁶⁴ <http://mideastposts.com/middle-east-society/middle-east-life/the-rising-wave-of-saudi-spinsters-and-the-shame-of-divorce/>

<http://susiesbigadventure.blogspot.com/2010/07/spinsters-in-saudi-arabia.html>

¹⁶⁵ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mmw/2008/12/egyptian-spinsters-and-old-maids-sitting-happily-on-the-shelf/>

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mmw/2008/12/egyptian-spinsters-and-old-maids-sitting-happily-on-the-shelf/>

that of a wall,” to illustrate this imperative to marry, which are repeated to women by their families, friends, and neighbors as a constant reminder of the role of women in the community—to make babies. She also references a column that Mokhtar wrote for *Youm7* in which Mokhtar describes a friend whom had a nervous breakdown due to the pressures she faced to get married.¹⁶⁷ In contrast to the government initiatives that tend to view the spinsterhood “crisis” in monetary terms or as the result of men straying from their cultural roots to marry foreigners, women cited here tend to see the problem in terms of finding men who will treat them as partners, which is substantiated by Piela’s (2011) study mentioned above. Muslim women have tired of the dynamic that ties communal acceptance of them to their procreative promise, so perhaps they are subtly resisting this norm by remaining unmarried.

The comments posted to the *Muslimah Media Watch* article suggest the universality of the stigmatization of spinsters. “Broomstick” mentions that both Hindu and Muslim South Asian women in the UK are stigmatized for remaining single. She goes on to broaden the disgrace of spinsterhood to women everywhere “except here in the Western world (unless you’re the daughter of an immigrant).” “Just a spinster” says, “this applies to every girl from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East ☺ not just Egypt.” “Sakura Passion,” however, extends the imperative for women to marry into the United States: “I live in the midwest, where women feel their main goal in life is to get married, and if they don’t they’ll become “old maids.” Another commenter, “Tabassum,” also acknowledges that the stigma of spinsterhood extends into the West in a *Muslimah Media Watch* article

¹⁶⁷ In Arabic at <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=48985#.Up2HtqVgyu4>

about spinsterhood in the Gulf¹⁶⁸; she writes, “The fact that she is older, more educated and financially independent can actually work against her. We certainly face it here in North America.”

The age of spinsters in various parts of the world may be a bit higher or lower but spinsterhood continues to be equated with the character flaws of women, especially independent, successful women, and societies everywhere continue to perceive it in a derogatory manner. Although Mokhtar and other Egyptians social media users are attempting to contribute to change at a societal level, they are also addressing an issue that affects women everywhere. Thus, following the theoretical position of some scholars, like Amin (2004), their actions reflect the rooted cosmopolitan aesthetic of acting locally but thinking globally. Egyptian women who support the empowerment of spinsters draw on their local experiences to establish both local and transnational support. Mokhtar’s use of Arabic, as well as Arabic being the popular linguist choice for many of the supporters of the initiative, make related campaigns inaccessible to non-Arabic speakers so it is actually the importance of the topic that has created the impetus for mediation in international media and networks.¹⁶⁹ Thus an issue, and the collective actors’ handling of it, is not inherently cosmopolitan but, if the topic spreads through social and conventional media networks and becomes accessible to many, its transnational popularity suggests its saliency in various contexts, its universalism. It is the interconnections within multiple spaces that allow the cosmopolitan dynamics of the topics to take root.

¹⁶⁸ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mmw/2012/07/the-problem-of-spinsterhood-in-the-gulf/>

¹⁶⁹ It should also be noted that perhaps the mediation of this issue within the dominant transnational connective memory operates under the assumption that the West has moved beyond the stigmatization of spinsters so the issue actually serves to demonstrate the perceived enduring distinctions between the East and West.

This section has demonstrated that spinsters do not necessarily believe that they need to be fixed by the proposed solutions offered by governments and their larger communities, solutions that are underpinned by communal and familial bullying of women to marry any man. Spinsters who speak out against their stigmatization want to convince others that they are valuable members of their communities even if they do not contribute to it in the conventional sense of procreating. They also deny that the cost of marriage is the principal factor that prevents them from wanting to marry; they want to wait until they find the right man or not marry at all. The subsequent sections will cull discussions from various datasets in an attempt to situate extenuating circumstances that might encourage Muslim women to remain single or resist marriage. As some Muslim spinsters have implied, they want marriage to be a choice rather than an inescapable obligation. Their pervasive lack of choices is reflected in their everyday lives in which they are generally denied agency in order to ensure communal moral standards with which they may or may not agree.

Extenuating Circumstances, Policing, and Agency

The various perspectives as to why there is a large and growing number of Muslims spinsters both in the Arab world and in the West encouraged me to look at the other datasets to determine if they could illuminate the trend. I found several possible extenuating issues that could explain why women are remaining unmarried. First, based on some of the discussions in the artificial hymen dataset, some may not be able to “prove” their virginity and they do not have the money to pay for a surgery and/or they do not trust that the artificial hymen will work; therefore, similar to the case of “Designer” in Chapter 3, they put off their wedding dates. Second, based on the dynamics

highlighted in the techno-ikhtilat dataset, due to online/offline gender segregation, some women cannot become adequately acquainted with their potential suitors, which may leave them apprehensive of committing to a man without first getting to know him first. While some women get acquainted with potential spouses through the internet, online gender mixing is contested within Muslim communities so this is not a viable option for all Muslim women. Discussions of gender segregation also highlighted pervasive gendered double standards within Muslim communities, which Muslim women may be attempting to destabilize. Third, based on the HarassMap dataset, women, in Egypt for example, where the percentage of unmarried women is quite high, may become distrusting of men in general due to the violence they face in the streets, which could contribute to their hesitation to marry. Fourth, based on the artificial hymen data, but also as a theme that threads throughout many of the datasets, stereotypes of Muslim women often render them as incapable of making their own choices so their families and communities attempt to control them through surveillance and bullying. In conjunction with the possible inability to “prove” one’s virginity, I will start with prevalent stereotypes of Muslim women in an attempt to elucidate why preconceptions of them may contribute to the policing of their behaviors, which ultimately limits their agency.

Broken Moral Compasses?

Sometimes Muslim women are denied choices due to the widespread belief that they will not make the right ones. While some Muslim women will engage in premarital sex in spite of social and familial policing, others, even those who are subjected to less policing, will decide to wait until they are married. However, stereotypes of women often lead larger communities to believe that women will without fail choose to ignore the

Qur'anic sanctions on premarital sex if they have the chance to do so without facing consequences. In a *Muslimah Media Watch* article related to why Muslim Brotherhood Shiekh Saied Askar believes that the artificial hymen should be banned in Egypt, the author, Eman Hashim, describes his misogyny in the following terms: “a woman is a weak creature who is incapable of choosing what to do and what not to do, and is easily tempted to commit “sins” if they became “easier to her.””¹⁷⁰ Hashim argues that women do not simply refrain from sex to be able to “prove” that they are virgins. Likewise, an appropriate response to the sheikh’s remarks is articulated by “7ayat Q.” on another posting about the proposed ban of the artificial hymen on Mona Eltahawy’s blog:

you’re demonstrating... a complete lack of faith in Muslim women to make ethical choices about what to do with their bodies. You are naive to think that banning a fake hymen will prevent premarital sex, and a tyrant to think it’s your place to say when and with whom a woman might part her thighs. Do you think that your values are so profoundly superior to that of a Muslim woman that you get to make that choice for us? Do you think we’re so stupid... that we can’t make any decent choices?¹⁷¹

“7ayat Q.” is averring that women have a right to decide what to do with their bodies and whether or not to engage in premarital sex and, if they do, she says that the larger society should not judge them. Her statement, as well as Hashim’s, also refutes the widely held belief that women have broken moral compasses, which would lead them to behave in an unseemly fashion if they thought they could get away with it.

In another article, Marwa Rakha reinforces “7ayat Q.’s” point that banning the artificial hymen would not prevent more women from engaging in premarital sex if that is what they choose to do. Rakha says that she does not understand why the news of the artificial hymen created such an outcry when “hymen restoration procedures have been ongoing since the nineties, [and] anal sex has replaced vaginal intercourse in many pre-

¹⁷⁰ <http://muslimahmediawatch.org/2009/09/a-new-bang-for-your-buck-fake-hymens-for-sale/>

¹⁷¹ <http://www.monaeltahawy.com/blog/?p=188>

marital relations.”¹⁷² She questions why the more convenient and cheaper prop offends Egyptians so much and inquires, “Don't they believe that there are many girls who just want to preserve their virginity until they get married because they WANT TO as opposed to they HAVE TO?” The statements of Rakha and “7ayat Q.” highlight the social propensity to assume that women will make immoral choices, rather than women being given the benefit of the doubt, so social actors who are thus persuaded attempt to deprive women of the opportunity to make their own choices. Although some will remain virgins because of they choose to, others, like “Leila,” a Moroccan woman cited in an *Afrik* piece, may want to explore their sexuality. “Leila” states that she remained a virgin until she was married to please her mother but she wished she had not. Says “Leila,” “This hymen paves the way...to become more liberated...If this object had been available a decade ago, I would have used it.”¹⁷³

Reflective of the various positions that Muslim women take on the issue of virginity, religious leaders articulate divergent opinions in regard to “revirginization” but, while these leaders expand religiously sanctioned choices for women, their views do not endeavor to challenge the social norm of women producing bloody sheets on their wedding night. In contrast to the Egyptian Sheikh mentioned above who supported the official ban of the artificial hymen, “Sandmonkey” references a fatwa in which another mufti states that it is permissible for women to “re-instate” their hymens for any reason due to the Islamic principle of avoiding of “El Satr” (scandal). If a woman is revirginated through hymenoplasty or if she engages an extramarital affair, the mufti states that she should not tell her fiancé or husband due to the same principle of avoiding scandal. His

¹⁷² <http://marwarakha.com/?p=645>

¹⁷³ <http://www.afrik-news.com/article16896.html>

reasoning is that this gives “fornicating girls... a second chance in life and [to] be able to get married.”¹⁷⁴ This fatwa may be reassuring to some women, like “Amel,” a Moroccan woman studying in France who decided to undergo hymenoplasty. Says “Amel” about her first sexual experience, “I dated a boy when I was 15 and I didn't even realize what had happened.”¹⁷⁵ She has saved up for the hymenoplasty mainly to spare her family from embarrassment. “If my mother ever found out about this, she would have a mental breakdown... I don't want to have this surgery, but I don't have any choice,” Amel told the *Reuters* reporter. Other women, who cannot afford the surgery or are concerned that the artificial hymen might not work, might decide to put off marriage until they reach their “expiration date” because it does not appear to be an option to be honest about their sexual experience, even if their fiancés are not themselves virgins. The hypocrisy related to their potential spouses not being virgins, while it appears that women have no choice, highlights one of the gendered double standards with which some Muslim women take issue, which I will discuss further in the next subsection.

This subsection highlighted the general assumption that women will act immorally if they have a chance, which was the basis for the proposed ban of the artificial hymen in Egypt. Some women voiced their indignation of being stereotyped as “naturally” lacking morality. While some Muslim women will remain virgins because they personally feel that it is important, other women, despite the efforts to control them, will continue to engage in premarital sex. Women of means will pay for the surgery and less affluent women will engage in anal intercourse to preserve their hymens or spill

¹⁷⁴ <http://www.sandmonkey.org/2007/02/15/the-re-hymenization-fatwa/>

¹⁷⁵ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/04/30/us-muslimwomen-europe-virginity-idUSL2532025120070430>

poultry blood on the sheets, which women have been doing for centuries (Shirazi, 2009). Women are at the very least expected to keep up the illusion of virginity even if they may want to be honest with their future spouses about their previous sexual encounters. However, in general, men are not even expected to maintain the façade of virginity, which is one of many double standards that I will explore in the next subsection.

Gender Segregation and Double Standards

The Qur’anic sanctions on premarital sex are fairly straightforward but other issues are less so, especially ones that were not addressed in the Qur’an because they did not exist during the time of the Prophet. The internet could be used in contexts that legally or socially proscribe gender mixing to get better acquainted with potential spouses but some Muslims argue that cyberspaces should be segregated just like offline venues, including online forums, even blog rolls.¹⁷⁶ In this case, the “cultured technology” reinforces offline religious values. Nevertheless, since online interactions function under a cloak of anonymity, men and women have the ability to engage in online gender mixing without suffering the judgment of their communities. Despite this autonomy granted by online identity concealment, a poll from the “Sister” section of *IslamWay.com* demonstrates that women will not necessarily disregard their religious beliefs when they have the option of doing so anonymously. Nearly half (512) of the 1075 women who responded to the question “Do you get Involved in Unnecessary Chatting with Men On the Net?” said they never did; 19% (213) said they did and they knew it was “Not Islamic”; nine percent responded that they did but they didn’t know that is was not

¹⁷⁶ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/07/21/saudi-arabia-segregation-on-the-blogroll/>

Islamic; and 23% said that they only did so “Very Rarely.”¹⁷⁷ In this example, only one in five willingly engage in behavior that they believe to be contrary to their faith. In some contexts in which cyberspaces are the only public spaces in which women can escape social surveillance, some women use the cloak of anonymity to engage in quite risqué behavior, like Saudi women stripping in front of chat audiences of more than 300 men,¹⁷⁸ but these incidents are rare and should be situated in the context of extreme subversion to the extreme denial of personal choices.

In light of the shared stories of Muslim women being taken advantage of by men online, some Muslims, such as Hafsah, claim that gender mixing is acceptable to further one’s Islamic knowledge but that Muslims should avoid using the internet to “free mix.”¹⁷⁹ Hafsah offered some guidelines for proper online conduct between men and women on *Ummah.com*, which included not sending pictures, avoiding audible communication, maintaining formality, remaining vigilante, and keeping in close contact with other women when using the internet at work. The last point suggests a certain level of surveillance among women, which is substantiated by the experiences of Mystique, a Saudi erotica blogger who decided to stop updating her blog after she told one of her female coworkers about it and then began to feel like the coworker was “watching [her]...every movement.”¹⁸⁰ However, discussants on *Sunniforum.org* claimed that even gender mixing to discuss religion is problematic, offering the example of Muslims’ overuse of the terms “brother” and “sister” on Islamic forums to create inappropriate endearment between men and women, which, according to these commenters, could lead

¹⁷⁷ <http://sisters.islamway.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=276>

¹⁷⁸ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzKlAPbmd_w

¹⁷⁹ <http://www.ummah.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-54217.html>

¹⁸⁰ <http://justworldnews.org/?p=1776>

to “fitnah”¹⁸¹ (social chaos). Since Muslims might use Islamic forums to flirt, one commenter says, “Regular Muslims,” denoted as a separate categorization from new converts or non-Muslims interested in Islam, “should behave with Islamic conduct of no causal talk.” Hence, one’s observance of online gender segregation could be a practice used to gauge one’s Muslimness, which I will discuss more in the Chapter 5, but it should be noted that both of the forums discussed above are based in contexts in which gender segregation is a choice.

Some Saudi women are clearly fatigued with their lack of options due to gender segregation. A *Huffington Post* article by Fahad Faruqui identifies an extreme measure that some Saudi women are willing to take to oppose gender segregation legislation: breastfeeding adult males to convert them to a woman’s *mahram* (male relatives that women cannot marry).¹⁸² In 2010, Saudi Sheikh Abdul Mohsen al-Obeikan, an adviser to the royal cabinet who was fired by King Abdullah,¹⁸³ claimed that women could undermine segregation in the workplace through offering male co-workers their breasts. In 2007, a similar fatwa was issued by an Egyptian cleric, Sheikh Izzat Attiya, who advised “direct breastfeeding...at least five times.” Although women to whom Faruqui spoke felt “ridiculed as a result of the exceedingly sexualized approach to gender mixing,” other women threatened the same measure as an organic response to limitations they face due to their gender. Saudi women associated with the Women2Drive movement, for example, said that they would breastfeed their male drivers if they were not given the

¹⁸¹ www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?t=3086

¹⁸² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/fahad-faruqui/islam-gender-segregation_b_650180.html

¹⁸³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18042467>

right to drive.¹⁸⁴ Some women also used the space created by media coverage of this fatwa to highlight the prevalence of gendered double standards in cultural practices fallaciously attributed to Islam; for example, one Saudi woman claims that men should then also be obliged to drink the breast milk of their domestic servants.

In contexts in which gender segregation is imposed on the population even the opening of a women-only spa in Riyadh can be controversial¹⁸⁵ because women do not have a choice in their everyday lives. According to Reem Asaad, the instigator of the Saudi lingerie campaign, the internet provides a space for Saudis to normalize gender relations through women's ability to converse while remaining "physically invisible,"¹⁸⁶ which perhaps explains the remark by "Saudi jeans" (Ahmed Al-Omran) who noted that the migration of Saudi women into cyberspace has outpaced that of men. However, even online, there are limitations, or double standards, related to women's online behaviors, such as the percentage of women who post their photographs on *Facebook* (5%) versus the percentage of men who use their photographs as avatars (60%).¹⁸⁷

Similarly, a Jordanian blogger, "7aki Fadi," claims there are differences in the blogging styles of men and women from the Middle East (also see Chapter 1). "7aki Fadi" begins by stating that if women want to fully protect themselves, they must blog anonymously because "an Arab woman's morals are judged by every single word that is uttered on her blog."¹⁸⁸ She goes on, "If a woman talks about going out with the

¹⁸⁴ <http://www.qatarliving.com/node/1119871>

¹⁸⁵ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/08/29/saudi-arabia-independent-women/>

¹⁸⁶ <http://www.minnpost.com/global-post/2010/02/internet-gives-saudi-women-rare-outlet-social-interaction>

¹⁸⁷ <http://www.minnpost.com/global-post/2010/02/internet-gives-saudi-women-rare-outlet-social-interaction>

¹⁸⁸ <http://7akifadi.com/2009/08/06/the-difference-between-men-and-women-in-the-middle-eastern-arab-blogsphere/>

girls... dating, or even if a woman is married and talks about her marriage openly...[she] is harshly judged and criticized, called slut or immoral.” Therefore, if a woman desires to broach these topics on her blog, she must remain anonymous. On the other hand, if a woman chooses to reveal her identity, she will censor the content of her social media use and rarely share her pictures. “7aki Fadi” says that the limited number of bloggers from the Middle East lends to the replication of societal norms online because the small size of Arabic blogospheres facilitates the efficiency of surveillance toward imposing compliance with social norms. In contrast, “7aki Fadi” claims that men will speak openly about sex and partying and, rather than being shamed, such content is considered humorous. Although men do engage in political and religious self-censorship for fear of inciting the wrath of the authorities, they are not targeted with the community policing to which female bloggers are subjected. “7aki Fadi” says, “if you are trying to escape your society by blogging...you will find it duplicated on the Internet. If you express thoughts that are different or that are not acceptable then you will be shamed, criticized and shunned.” There were a lot of interesting comments posted to this thread but Yakuza’s is particularly relevant to the discussion at hand. Yakuza says that being an unspoken Arab woman is itself taboo, a parallel theme (as well as a pervasive one), which coincides with perceptions of female appropriateness and “good wives.” I will discuss this parallel more in the next subsection.

Although the internet could be a viable option for intended spouses to get to know one another, the prevalent policing of women’s actions online and offline often precludes its potential in this regard. Furthermore, some Muslim women will refrain from gender mixing online because they feel that the practice of gender segregation should apply to

online spaces as well. Yet social media are useful in relation to situating Muslim women's rejection of double standards, which hold them responsible for communal morality through limiting their agency, because they are often shamed or labeled as "liberated" and/or "feminist" for speaking out against these double standards offline. The next section will highlight how these double standards and the denial of women's agency, imposed through violence, may result in the general distrust and dehumanization of Egyptian men by women, which feeds the latter's apprehension of marriage.

Violence and Distrust

Many Muslim communities socially impose gender segregation to varying degrees. Egypt, for example, does not have any laws stipulating gender segregation, but sexual violence on the street creates the *ad hoc* imposition of a segregated public sphere dominated by men, which, as described in Chapter 3, results in the self-disappearances of some Egyptian women to avoid gendered violence. In this section, I will argue that the limited choices of women as well as the violent dominance over the public sphere by men could undermine the appeal of marriage from the perspectives of women who face daily harassments in the streets. This is a data-driven theory that may only accommodate a few social outliers, like the spinsters and a few of the women in the HarassMap dataset, though it could also be evidence of a growing trend.

There were a few connections between sexual harassment and spinsterhood in the datasets related to Muslim spinsters and HarassMap, most notably the international coverage of Ghada Abdel Aal's book, "I Want to Get Married!" Almost all the online news coverage of the book discusses the rampant sexual harassment in the Egyptian society but the articles tend to imply that harassment is due to the inability of many

couples to get married due to financial constraints, a notion that is disputed by many of the Egyptian bloggers because married men and young boys also harass women. “678,” an award-winning film about sexual harassment in Egypt, drew several parallels between marriage and harassment, including the following: Fayza, after being harassed on the bus daily, refuses her husband sex and he eventually becomes a harasser himself; Seba is attacked by a crowd of men with her husband watching the scene but unable to intervene—the attack ends up destroying their marriage when her husband cannot offer her the support that she needs; and Nelly’s court case against a harasser, a rendition of the experiences of Noha Rushdie (see Chapter 2), creates problems between she and her fiancée when he pressures her to withdraw the harassment charges. While the narratives are fictional the director, Mohamed Diab, claims they are related to experiences that women have personally divulged to him.¹⁸⁹

Economic issues are clearly important determinants of a couple’s ability to marry. A woman may take steps to become financially independent, due to the uncertainty of the marriage market, which makes her less attractive to potential spouses. In other cases, she may not want children to be her defining moment; she may want her career to be. According to a study of Algeria women, 50% of respondents wanted to work in comparison to 6.2% of the women who were primarily interested in marriage but, even among the latter group, 72% of the respondents wanted to keep working after they were married (Dris-Ait-Hamadouche, 2007). Some of these women do not want to have to choose between one and the other option.

¹⁸⁹ <http://cmfilmcommentary.com/2013/10/04/mohamed-diab-sffs/>

Some literature implies that women's are becoming generally disillusioned with courtship and marriage, particularly the hierarchical arrangement of marital relations. Situmorang (2007) quotes Jones (2004) in stating that "women have lost faith in marriage," speaking to the experience of Indonesia women in Muslim-majority communities (p. 289). Similarly, as Kholoussy (2010) points out in regard to Abdel Aal's book, people tend to focus on male concerns regarding the "marriage crisis" and overlook that spinsters, like Abdel Aal, who is perhaps somewhat representative of other Egyptian spinsters, are rejecting the social norm of marrying the first man with a flat to ask for their hand. Says Kholoussy, "[Abdel Aal] demands her right to get to know her suitor to make sure he is right for her. And if she never finds a partner, she is asking society to respect her nonetheless" (n.d.). Relatedly, an activist with the Egyptian New Woman Foundation, Lanya Lofty, says, "I have two daughters and am teaching them two things...Don't let any men harass you, and before you get married to a man, see what his brothers and mother have to say about women."¹⁹⁰ Lofty is implying that, particularly due to the limited contact between prospective spouses prior to marriage due to socially imposed gender segregation, women are not really permitted to get to know men before they get married and, more importantly, how they will treat their wives once they are married. Thus women must rely on their interactions with others with whom their prospective spouses are associated to gain a sense of the type of men they are.

As I see it, the streets of Egypt might also suggest to women how men will treat them when they are married. Men on the street determine what they wear, where they go, and the times of day that are safer to travel, which are forms of policing imposed through

¹⁹⁰ http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/06/world/europe/06iht-letter06.html?_r=2&emc=eta1

violent male dominance over the public sphere. There were several references to this dominance through violence in the HarassMap and SlutWalk Morocco datasets.

According to a blog posting on *Stuck in the Middle*,

Old men as well as prepubescent boys harass their female counterparts, making Cairo streets safe and comfortable only for males. Because of this, many women avoid walking completely. This limited mobility widens the gender gap and hinders women's opportunities to get an education, work, socialize; move around their country freely.¹⁹¹

Maggie Osama, writing at *The World through Egyptian Eyes*, relates the male public sphere to male chauvinism in that “men were brought up to believe they are superior to women, and that they should be in charge. A woman's success scares a man and pushes him to act in an inconvenient manner trying to block her way or bring her down.” “Leila,” blogging at *9.20 M for Miscellaneous*, observes that male chauvinism has resulted from the pervasiveness of gendered double standards. Says “Leila,” “our society...[has] developed a perfect excuses system for the men. We wear Hijjabs to protect us...it's ok because God made...[men] that way...it's ok for men to date...to cheat...they are made differently, so it's not their fault.”¹⁹² In this same posting, “Leila” claims that this contributes to blaming women for harassment due to the just world fallacy, in which people tend to rationalize injustice by blaming the victim (also see Chapter 3). Since the Egyptian society buys into the idea that men cannot help but to act violently toward women, it appeases itself by insisting that the woman must have done something to deserve the sexual violence she suffered.

Part of women's lack of choices in the Egyptian society manifests in them being pawns in the “modern” and “traditional” dialectic, which is often played out through judging them based on their choice in clothing. Although the “traditional” standpoint

¹⁹¹ <http://stuckinthemiddle.wordpress.com/2011/06/21/sexual-harassment-in-cairo-part-1/>

¹⁹² <http://920m.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/just-world-hypothesis-aka-the-blame-game/>

insists that modesty (read: veiling) protects women in the streets, women demand the right to wear whatever they would like because veiling, from a heuristic position, does not make any difference in regard to minimizing harassment. “Menna,” for example, shares a note on the HarassMap *Facebook* page in which she describes the harasser who lives in her head. Says “Menna,”

He looks at my body in the morning as I put on my clothes, justifying why his friends in the street will rip me apart...He shuts me up when I try to speak for myself in the street saying "I told you so, that shirt was too low cut..." He looks through my eyes and sees a piece of meat, convincing me that its all anybody ever sees.¹⁹³

The voice that “Menna” hears is not just that of the harasser but also the voice of the Egyptian society in its judgment of women. Many of the activists involved in the “End Sexual Harassment” campaign are demanding the right to wear whatever they want because they are rejecting the social norm of victim-blaming. On June 20, 2011, “Ghazala Irshad” writes on the HarassMap *Twitter* page, “I want the right to walk where I want, whenever I want--whether in hijab or not”¹⁹⁴ Similarly, “NadaPrudence” says, “I hope one day I can walk freely in Egypt...wearing whatever I feel like wearing.”¹⁹⁵ Osama claims that harassment has increased despite the more modest levels of dress in comparison to several decades ago,

I am blaming [the norm of street harassment on] people who are accusing women of being totally responsible...as they believe that women encourage men to harass because of their outfits. If this is true... why [are] women with niqab, hijab, conservative clothing are not safe from harassment? even children...get sexually harassed!. In 60's & 70's, women used to wear short skirts/dresses and high heels, took public transportation and...the percentage of harassment was very low.¹⁹⁶

Osama is addressing street harassment as a “modern” phenomenon in which the newfound disrespect of women coincides with dysfunctionality of the Mubarak era,

¹⁹³ https://www.facebook.com/HarassMapEgypt/posts/349748891763757?comment_id=2892388&offset=0&total_comments=5

¹⁹⁴ <https://twitter.com/harassmap>

¹⁹⁵ <http://nadaprudence.blogspot.com/2011/06/gender-female.html>

¹⁹⁶ <http://theangryegyptian.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/enough-sexual-harassment/>

although the 1970s also coincide with the rise of the modern Islamists movement that contributed to the backtracking of women's rights that had been achieved under the platform of national development after the fall of the Ottoman empire (Badran, 2005).

Egyptian women do not believe that they should have to limit their access to the public sphere to avoid being harassed. "The Angry Egyptian," a woman blogging at *Tahrir and Beyond*, says, "The rhetoric of accusing the women [*sic*] for "bringing sexual harassment upon herself" by being late on the street is the most ridiculous."¹⁹⁷ She also claims that women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are harassed more simply because they are forced to spend more time on the street and on public transportation, which is consistent with the character portrayals in the film "678," being that the working class woman was the one who was subjected to the most harassment. "Nameless Babble," claims, "A person has the right to walk freely anywhere in this world without being subject to excruciating encroachments on their private space."¹⁹⁸ Sama Singer alludes to the notion that sexual harassment is the result of the objectification of women and demands that the Egyptian society recognize her as a person. Says Singer,

Dear society instead of asking me to cover up, to stay at home...before you separate me in public transportation , instead of asking me not to exist in places where men exist , you should know that I am a human...not an entertainment tool, I have the right to walk down the streets...¹⁹⁹

However, women are understandably afraid to go out due to the habitual violence they suffer in the public sphere. "emmokaykay," blogging at *Title Pending*, says, "I don't feel safe in my own city, in my own neighborhood, in my own street. They are mine aren't they? As [an] Egyptian I do own them, then why do they scare me?"²⁰⁰ This claim to

¹⁹⁷ <http://theangryegyptian.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/enough-sexual-harassment/>

¹⁹⁸ <http://namelessbabble.blogspot.com/2011/06/sexual-harassment-in-egypt.html>

¹⁹⁹ <http://betweenbracts.blogspot.com/2011/06/i-share-my-daily-harassment-experience.html>

²⁰⁰ <http://emmokaykay.tumblr.com/post/6718086348/its-hard-out-there-for-a-female>

ownership of the streets has perhaps become more pronounced since women participated in the revolution alongside men. The limitations of women's agency related to their mobility (Badran, 1996; MacLeod, 1991; cooke, 2000), choices in dress (MacLeod, 1991), and concerns about violence (Gallagher, 2012) are all issues that women must consider in selecting a mate and/or deciding to remain single.

Several Egyptian women see this as a struggle that they were disenchanted to discover persisted even after their participation in ousting Mubarak. However, particularly since women and men freely co-inhabited the streets during the revolution, some women say that they will return violence against men who manhandle them in public. For example, Singer has let her actions speak for her in relation to a few incidents of sexual harassment: when a man fondled her legs on a bus, she pushed him off the seat they shared and stomped on him; and, on another occasion, a man sitting behind her had shoved his hand between the bus seats to touch her back and she reacted by crushing his fingers with the seat. Although those present on the buses disagreed with her tactics, she claims that both of those men will think twice before harassing another woman. Says Singer, "Stop blaming me if I acted violently towards the harasser...I have each and every right to defend my body."²⁰¹ Another woman on the HarassMap *Twitter* page says she beat a harasser with her flag at a protest. Similarly, "ForSoothSayer" suggests, "Tazers, stun guns, mace, pepper spray... Yes, they're largely illegal. I don't give a fuck. When enough men get tazed, they'll think twice about harassment."²⁰² In "678," "Fayza" likewise becomes so enraged by the daily harassment she is subjected to on the bus that she begins carrying a razor blade to slice the genitals of men who grope her. These

²⁰¹ <http://betweenbracts.blogspot.com/2011/06/i-share-my-daily-harassement-experience.html>

²⁰² <http://forsoothsayings.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/sexual-harassment-fuck-selmeya/>

women are likely driven to return violence because the society and state have not only failed to protect women but also they contribute to blaming women for harassment because they frame harassed women as having deviated from social norms, especially those who cause a scene by speaking out against harassment.

Some of the blog discussions outline women's growing distrust, even hatred, of men, which clearly conflicts with the possibility of women wanting marry one of them. Yosra Abdel Meguid Mostafa, for example, articulates this possibility on her *Facebook* page. She says, "Every harassment situation a girl goes through affects her and her coming life (in terms of how she would react to harassment situations in the future, maybe even her relationship with the other sex in general)."²⁰³ Likewise, "Leila" claims that her experiences with sexual harassment in the streets have resulted in recurring nightmares and psychological trauma, which her therapist associates with her distrust of men, a point to which she concedes: "the nightmares are a result of becoming the target of sexual harassment...that I was only conscious of on a subconscious level."²⁰⁴ Later in the same post, Leila states, "I am not totally comfortable with any male who[m] I haven't known all my life." Being that, according to a study conducted by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR), 63% of Egyptian males admit to perpetrating sexual harassment in the streets,²⁰⁵ the chances that a woman's prospective spouse may have engaged in the verbal and/or physical harassment of women are substantial and, as such, the element of distrust may be warranted.

²⁰³ https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=10150214897508803

²⁰⁴ <http://920m.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/the-me-in-sexual-harassment/>

²⁰⁵ http://egypt.unfpa.org/Images/Publication/2010_03/6eeeb05a-3040-42d2-9e1c-2bd2e1ac8cac.pdf

In another blog posting, “Leila” says that she has no desire to marry. Although she says that Egyptian girls are taught from a very young age to consider “marrying well” as the “crowning achievement,” she claims that she falls outside of the margins of female desirability, which, in the Egyptian context, she frames as being “beautiful, biddable, quiet, unopinionated, not too intelligent, a good breeder and last but not least a good housekeeper.” “Leila” has been told that she was “unfit to be a girl” and a “disgrace to womankind” because she is “naturally messy, clumsy, and loud.”²⁰⁶ In reality, none of the female bloggers who participated in the “End Sexual Harassment” campaign appeared to fit into this tidy compartment of what is considered appropriate for woman, simply because they were speaking out against injustices. In a third posting connected to the “End Sexual Harassment” campaign, “Leila” states that people assume that, since she wears hijab, she is a “good girl” and does not have the “right not to marry and procreate” and to serve her “husband and his every whim.”²⁰⁷ By using the term “good girl,” she is referring to typologies of Muslims, which I will discuss further in the Chapter 5, similar to Hina Khan’s discussion of liberal v. practicing Muslims that was noted previously in conjunction with polygyny and *ijtihad*. Furthermore, “Leila’s” comment highlights her thoughts on what married life entails—serving her husband’s every whim, which may not be an attractive prospect for many women—and reinforces the statement of Muslim spinsters regarding communal perceptions of unmarried women as “bad girls.”

For some women, their apprehension of men has escalated into detest. “Sarah,” blogging at *Lessons Yet to Be Learned*, says, “If it wasn’t for my amazing father, I

²⁰⁶ <http://920m.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/r-e-s-p-e-c-t/>

²⁰⁷ <http://920m.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/the-double-edged-sword-a-veiled-perception/>

would've hated every single man on the face of the planet!"²⁰⁸ "Sarah" claims that the prevalence of sexual harassment is symptomatic of the diseased Egyptian society in which men exert a perverse form of manliness through belittling women, which has become normalized in the society. However, she also avers that the struggles of Egyptian women have marked their femininity as strong, robust, and smart; they are, therefore, up to the task of challenging unjust social norms. In response to her posting, one man accuses her of exhibiting fascist female chauvinism and another claims that women are inferior to men because Allah said that women lack "brains and religion." Charming! The latter comment demonstrates that ahadith such as these likely underpin the stereotype of women lacking morality that I discussed in an earlier subsection.

More often than not harassers, which make up the majority of men in Egypt, are not even referenced as men. "D," for example, calls them "pigs."²⁰⁹ "Suzeeinthecity," blogging at *Diary of A DeskGirl in Cairo*, refers to a man as a "predator" and men as "a pack of rapid dogs." She also creates a scenario in her head to deal with the trauma of violence in the street:

So I play a little game in my head. It's like walking through a videogame scene, where every man is a potential predator, and I keep my radar finely tuned, my walk fast and dontmesswithme, my eyes scanning every corner for attackers. Over the years, I've acquired a Robocop face that occasionally scares the living shit out of small children and animals, and my middle finger is my videogame weapon that I choose to shoot when the moment comes.²¹⁰

"Suzeeinthecity's" narrative implies that not only have women become objectified in the streets, but also women have begun to dehumanized men as a coping mechanism for sexual violence. An *English Ahrām* article also recognizes the dehumanization of

²⁰⁸ <http://sarah-lessons.blogspot.com/2011/06/sick-society.html>

²⁰⁹ <http://bathtagreby.blogspot.com/2011/06/endsh-day.html>

²¹⁰ <http://diaryofadeskgirl.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/im-an-egyptian-woman-and-i-like-being-sexually-harrassed/>

harassers, stating, “a more compassionate outlook [on harassment]...neither blames the victim nor strips the perpetrator of his humanity, since it views the latter as a sick person.”²¹¹ This article also links the issues of the emancipation of women, harassment, and spinsterhood.

The new enemy of Egyptian women, Egyptian men on the street, is often framed as an animal, not a potential spouse. Being catcalled and fondled all day hardly leaves a woman open to friendly dialogue with a man whom may actually want to get to know her toward forming an enduring relationship. The problem is that women are so accustomed to getting harassed that they may ignore even the sincere efforts of men to get to know them so, if HarassMap is successful in curbing the rampant violence against women on the streets, some of the nine million spinsters in Egypt might consider reevaluating their single status. Hence, in Egypt, as in other contexts, spinsterhood is partially related to the exorbitant cost of marriage but it could also be related to suitors and their perceived likelihood to treat their wives like human beings, or better yet partners. That being said, spinsterhood could be seen as subtle resistance against gender inequality, including the pervasive double standards mentioned above. It is perhaps easier to remain on the “shelf” until one’s expiration date has passed than to openly challenge patriarchy. Similar to the activism against martyrdoms in Chapter 3, the women I have discussed in this subsection engage in subtle resistance by focusing on a specific issue, sexual harassment, allowing them to discuss their rights without linking abuses of patriarchy, which could delegitimize women’s right movements in some Muslim communities.

²¹¹ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/4/37162/Opinion/Sexual-harassment-in-Egypt-after-the-revolution-.aspx>

Like international activism related to spinsterhood, the HarassMap campaign frames sexual harassment as a universal concern. Due to the universality of these issues, they also present the cosmopolitan aesthetic of developing basic common standards. Just as women have the right to remain single without suffering stigmatization, women have the right to walk in the street in whatever clothing they choose without being harassed. Collectivization around spinsterhood and sexual harassment demonstrates that Muslim women want choices. They do not want their worth to be judged by their ability to marry and have children because some may want to contribute to their communities in other ways. In the same vein, Muslim women do not want to be coerced into veiling to prevent the community from blaming them when they face sexual harassment. They want unfettered access to the public sphere and they want to be equally, not completely, responsible for the maintenance of social mores.

This subsection has discussed how violence against women in the street may be indicative of general beliefs regarding the status of women in the community and the family, which may discourage some women from wanting to commit to marriage. The next section will draw on literature related to women's agency to further situate how social media, as cultured technologies, may foster the extension of subtle resistance and collectivization among women at least through digital conversations if not also through online/offline actions.

Discussion

This chapter has discussed the myriad of Muslim perspectives on and solutions to the issue of spinsterhood. While it may appear melodramatic to call it a crisis, it is a grave concern for the maintenance of patriarchy and the avoidance of "fitna," a term that

signifies moral and social chaos in Muslims communities but is also employed in social media in regard to illicit relationships between men and women and even to reference women's resistance to social norms. According to Moghadam (2004), following Mernissi's (1987) discussion of the changing dynamics of marriage in the Arab world, "the idea of a young unmarried woman is completely novel in the Muslim world, for the whole concept of patriarchal honor is built around the idea of virginity, which reduces woman's role to its sexual dimension: reproduction within early marriage" (p. 153). Some women want to challenge the "cult of the hymen," but they recognize that being honest about engaging in sexual relations could have disastrous effects on their future acceptance within their communities. Thus women who cannot produce bloody sheets or/and do not want to perpetuate the double standard that stipulates that women must at least feign virginity, while it is a choice for men, may put off marriage. I am not implying that all women would engage in premarital sex if they had the opportunity; as discussed in a previous subsection related to women chatting online with men, one in five would willingly commit an act they believed to be unIslamic. But they do want the choice. The assumption that women must be saved from themselves stems from cultural preconceptions that have no Qur'anic foundations because, as Wadud (1999) emphasizes, the Qur'an renders the spirituality of men and women as essentially equal (also see Bodman, 1998; Stowasser, 1984). However, the prevalent double standards based on gender do not demonstrate that much is expected of men spiritually so women are often charged with upholding the morality of both genders This is not only true of the Arab world, as women from all over the world in the hijabi fashion dataset also believe that it is their duty to veil to protect the morality of men and their communities (see Chapter 5).

This tendency to charge women with upholding the moral standards of the community is not a norm that is unique to Muslim communities either. According to McClintock (1995), it is the norm in all cultures (as cited in Ringrose & Renold, 2012). In the Arab world, the imposition of this charge is often most acutely played out in the home because, as Tohidi (1991) says, “the painfully disorienting process of modernization...revived calls for patriarchal control over the family and female mobility...For the insecure and *mustaz’af* [disempowered] Muslim male...the patriarchal family provides...the last remaining bastion of authority and sense of honor” (p. 281). She goes on to say that the family network, although it opposes “individualization and self-actualization of the male and especially female persons” has served as a buffer against repressive states and

Most women in developing countries...although wanting to ensure that their rights are respected and acknowledged cannot afford or are unwilling to assert women’s right in a way that “estranges them not just from their family but also from their larger community” (p. 282).

Despite this dialectic between wanting to assert women’s rights and avoiding the estrangement of their families and communities, Tohidi (1991) also recognizes “the growing sense of self-assertion among modern middle-class women aware of their more personal choice in marriage and motherhood” (p. 283), which does not necessarily present itself as an explicit rejection of the patriarchal family but implies the increasing importance of agency to this group of women within public spheres and the home.

Women’s agency does not necessarily suggest that women will do whatever they want, particularly in light of Tohidi’s (1991) statement that women are not willing to assert themselves in ways that estrange their families or communities. For example, both “Amel” and “Leila,” mentioned above from the artificial hymen dataset, reference their

mothers in their decisions to “revirginize” or remain virginal, respectively. The desire of some women to please their families will continue to weigh in on their choices and some will choose to remain virgins as a result of the importance of their chastity to their families or to themselves. In the same vein, Mahmood (2001) situates agency as “the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weights of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)” (p. 206). “Capacity to realize” does not always translate into action but Mahmood (2001) sees it as a “slumbering ember that can spark to flame in the form of an act of resistance when conditions permit” (p. 206). She also argues that “illiberal actions can arguably be tolerated if it is determined that they are undertaken by a freely consenting individual who acted on her own accord” (p. 207). By “illiberal,” Mahmood (2001) is referencing religious social actors who were the focus of her study: the women’s mosque movement. From Mahmood’s (2001) perspective, it is not only agency, which she claims that Butler (1997) defines as synonymous with resistance, that produces change but also “agentival” efforts to sustain traditional religious beliefs; for example, women, in their efforts to perfectly conform with Islamic norms, engage in practices of self-actualization, which move them beyond the objective of the “negative rights” (freedom from obstacles) into the realm of “positive rights” (self-actualization). Her point is that, although the agency of Muslim women may not play out in the same way that the concept is theorized by Western feminists, at times, for example, Muslim women invoking Islam as a force of empowerment, this form of agency is equally important, particularly in regard to religious women.

On the other hand, Bucar (2010) classifies Mahmood's theoretical position on agency as "heteronomy," or "good girls" acting out "religious traditions" (p. 666), which she conceptualizes as distinct from "autonomy" and "theonomy." Says Bucar (2010), "'Autonomy' emphasizes the importance of the individual in moral life and sees a woman as the source of her freedom and innovation" (p. 665) and "theonomy" is a "possible middle ground between autonomy and heteronomy" (p. 666). However, she claims that theonomy, which would likely describe the agency related to Islamic feminism, due to its deity-centered focus, tends to sidestep the lived experiences of women living in religious communities. Bucar (2010), therefore, introduces "dianomy" as a theoretical stance that addresses moral economies without ignoring the empirical realities of women. According to Bucar (2010), "Dianomy recognizes that both an individual and her community are important; that agency is shaped within specific conditions...and that there is a possibility of creative compliance that is not necessarily intentional resistance" (p. 666). Dianomy is, in some ways, similar to subtle resistance, although Bucar (2010) does not explicitly situate one's personal relationship with God in her theoretical framework, which might be considered distinct from both individual and communal influences on agency.

While dianomy is an important concept and one that frames some of the examples of agency I encountered in this research, there are also examples that migrate toward heteronomy and autonomy, which mark distinctions between communities, practices, preferences in the consumption of religious knowledge, and so forth. Further, the forms of agency that Bucar categorizes as heteronomy are not necessarily limited to "good girls." Many of the discussions in the datasets exhibited more of a tendency toward heteronomy

than autonomy, but they were not limited to “women’s mosque movement” (Mahmood, 2001). For example, some whom other Muslims might describe as “liberal” were arguing for female interpretations of the Qur’an to counter what they viewed as misogynous traditions based on male interpretations. My point is that the variance among Muslims makes it difficult to render agency in homogenous terms, even if the concept attempts to make sense of the multiple dialectics that come into play in the decision-making processes of these women.

Although Muslim women have an opportunity to exert their agency online, there are notable obstacles to the possibilities offered through social media toward this end. For instance, I found multiple references to women’s participation in policing other women in both online and offline spaces, as demonstrated by the earlier discussion of online gender segregation. Skalli (2006) cites other obstacles, including the “exclusionary patriarchal ideologies on- and off-line” as well as “the cost of computer/connection, low computer literacy, relevance of language and Internet material...and censorship” (p. 50). Despite the “exclusionary patriarchal ideologies” and regardless of whether or not readers agree with what these women say online, even if opponents troll their websites and social media commentary, social media users are being exposed to other viewpoints related to topics of interest to Muslim women that may expand how they think about these issues. If one views the increasing use of the internet by Muslim women, like Saudi women whose migration online that has outpaced men’s, as a unrealized ember, as Mahmood (2001) says, social media could be perceived as spaces of potential resistance. Furthermore, through their social media engage, Muslim women are challenging dominant discourse related to sexual harassment, for example, by framing it as violence rather than flirting,

and refuting the well-established social norm of blaming women for the actions of men. In regard to spinsterhood, Muslim women are subverting the dominant discourse that suggests that women's only means of contributing to society is through having babies. While conspicuous challenges to social norms and dominant discourses remain somewhat rare, everyday resistance buffered through social media has become increasingly prevalent.

An important aspect of women's agency thus appears to be men's accountability for their own actions. While the perpetuation of the "just a man" philosophy persists, illustrated, for example, by the remarks of "Omani Princess," other women ardently reject being held responsible for the inexcusable actions of men, especially when they have taken every precaution to prevent being blamed for men's misdeeds (such as women who veil but continue to be harassed in the streets). They employ the internet as a "third space" or "in-between space" (Christensen, 2011; Muller & Druin, 2003; Bhabha, 1994) to discuss issues that are not easily broached among the larger disapproving society offline. According to Hoover and Echchaibi (2012), cited in Campbell (2012b), this third space is "a hybridized and fluid context requiring new logics and evoking unique forms of meaning-making" (also see Campbell, 2012a). Campbell (2012b) goes on to say that "digital religion" requires the acknowledgement of "how the unique character of digital technology and culture shapes religious practices and beliefs [and]...how religions seek to culture new media contexts with established ways of being and convictions about the nature of reality and the larger world" (p. 4). This statement not only highlights how online religion could lead to the evolution of religious beliefs and practices but also how Muslim women could draw on their lived experiences to foster greater understanding of

their perspectives and promote the establishment of universal basic standards of rights through the delicate art of debunking patriarchy without framing their actions as such.

Conclusion

This chapter has framed a variety of opinions on the growing trend of spinsterhood among Muslim women. The dominant governmental and communal discourse on the issue has generally ignored the possibility that some Muslim women may not want to marry. Some may want to focus on their careers and others may not be thrilled with the prospect of marrying men who may believe that they are superior to women. However, male superiority does not begin and end with men and women; members of any given community are socialized through dominant beliefs on gender relations. Men are often socialized to believe that they are not responsible for their actions and the larger society is ever forgiving of their mistakes because the responsibility for the morality of both genders is placed firmly on the shoulders of women. Women are challenging related social norms spuriously connected to Islam through male interpretations of the Qur'an, which are grounded in the male scholars' preconceived notions based on their own socialization. One of the most effective ways of unhinging patriarchy without challenging it directly is through the disruption of the foundation of this hierarchical system—the patriarchal family (Engels, 2010). Muslim women would face insurmountable obstacles in challenging the whole system but they could reject what the community has deemed to be their principal role in the maintenance of the system: marriage and motherhood.

The next chapter will build on some of the concepts discussed in this chapter, *ijtihad* and typologies of Muslims. It will elucidate how online communities based on

Islamic practices and the consumption of religious knowledge have migrated online and how these communities resist and/or reinforce the sanctity of the “ummah” through their online and offline promotion of specific ritual.

Chapter 5

Communities and Ijtihad

Urooj Arshad is a Pakistani expatriate and queer Muslim activist. When she immigrated to the United States at the age of 16, she felt isolated in the predominantly white suburb where her family moved. Later, in college, when she came out as a lesbian, she again felt ostracized from the larger LGBTQ community as a Muslim and a woman of color. She finally discovered a sense of community when she joined the Al-Fatitha Foundation, an organization dedicated to normalizing the queer Muslims identity. Arshad says that the knowledge that there was “another Pakistani Muslim queer person out there, started to fill a hole...[that she] did not even know existed and...[she] stopped believing that...[she] would never be able to reconcile...[her] sexuality with...[her] religion and culture.”²¹² Al-Fatiha not only attempts to normalize relations between the queer Muslims and the larger Muslim community but it also counters the widespread Islamophobia and homophobia in the American society. In the dataset related to Muslim lesbians, many queer Muslims, like Arshad, feel isolated but social media have the capacity to connect these isolated individuals with each other and to contribute to community building online, if not offline as well. However, as I will discuss, social media can also reinforce online/offline boundaries of inclusion between these various Muslim communities.

In contrast to the scholarly tendencies to study websites oriented specifically to Muslims (Bunt, 2004) or particular online communities of Muslims based on geographical locations and ethnic compositions (Christensen, 2012), this chapter

²¹² <http://www.advocate.com/commentary/2012/09/14/oped-islam-and-lgbt-are-not-mutually-exclusive>

broaches a distinct method of studying online Muslim networks. The first part will analyze the American node of the transnational network of hijabi fashion bloggers that collectivizes around the Islamic mandate on modesty in a creative manner. The second part will introduce everyday discussions related to the topic of Muslim lesbians or Muslims who are attracted to others of the same sex in dominant transnational cyberspaces. The chapter will attempt to locate how these “networks of practice,” which are online networks that foster interaction among people who subscribe to common beliefs and/or rituals, speak to multiple textures of Islamic knowledge consumption. The network based on the traditional practice of veiling tends to display greater homophily, a theoretical position that argues that all types of networks veer toward greater homogeneity (McPherson et al., 2001), while the topically oriented data on Muslim lesbians demonstrates greater heterogeneity in practices and approaches to religious knowledge, principally illustrated through differing opinions on who could legitimately engage in *ijtihad* (personal interpretation of religious texts).

This chapter will expand upon the discussions in Chapter 4 regarding typologies of Muslims, what Hina Khan describes as “practising,” and “liberal,” but, as I will demonstrate in the subsequent sections, the categories are more multivalent than this dichotomy suggests. By “practising” Khan is referring to traditional Islamic beliefs and practices and the category of “liberal” implies Muslims who question traditional beliefs and practices. These labels are not necessarily self-ascribed but have developed both from inside and outside Muslim communities based on “public rituals,” or the observable practices of the Muslims. However, scholars also use the typologies to describe ideological diversity, differing opinions on *Shari’ah*, and approaches to Islamic

knowledge (Mandaville, 2001; Roy, 2012; al-Hibri, 1997; Duderija, 2007; Safi, 2007). The “practising,” or traditional, Muslims examined below are members of the hijabi fashion network in which the hijab and social media serve as technologies of exclusion within Muslim communities because these technologies have erected parameters of acceptability based on a specific practice and the strong opinions articulated on these hijabis’ blogs discourage unveiled women from joining these online conversations about the practice of veiling. The topical analysis of Muslim lesbians demonstrates both “traditional” and “liberal,” alternately labeled as “progressive,” Muslim perspectives and some confluence of both. Some queer Muslims have no problem reconciling their sexuality with the Islamic faith through their practice of *ijtihad*, while other Muslims reject queerness through traditional interpretations of the Islamic scriptures and frame *ijtihad* as *bid’ah* (heretical, religious innovation); the latter Muslims also argue that coming out as “queer Muslims” is weakening the (heteronormative) ummah. Despite the distinct methodologies, the Muslim-oriented network versus the transnational cyberspaces topical analysis, these cases share commonalities in that they both relate to Islamic practices and approaches to religious knowledge.

The next section will situate how online Muslim populations and their associated cyberspaces have often been analyzed in scholarly studies, which are not perhaps sufficiently sensitive to the network dynamics that underpin online interactions among these populations.

Digital Muslim Spaces

The lack of a central authority and wealth of issues on which clerics disagree, like revirgination (see Chapter 4), contribute to the multitudinous textures of Islamic

knowledge and Muslim perspectives. Ignoring various Islamic sects for a moment, Sunni Muslims will themselves categorize other Sunni Muslims, for example, into numerous categories based on their observance of interpretation-based Islamic practices: how often they pray; if they go to the mosque on Fridays; if they only eat halal meat; if they date; if they speak Arabic; if they wear modest clothing; if they drink alcoholic beverages; if they fast during Ramadan; if they marry, particularly other Muslims; if they remain virgins until they are married, and so on. There are additional categories for Muslim women: if they wear hijab/niqab/burqa; if they work outside of the home; if they resist social norms and/or are involved in protests; if they refrain from engaging in sexual acts apart from coitus; if they go out to clubs; if they have guy friends; if they talk to men online; if they have boyfriends; if they buy into traditional male interpretations of the Qur'an and ahadith, and so forth.

As discussed in Chapter 4, since this research does not simply broach Islam but online Islam, it is important to characterize the online spaces in which Muslims interact. These spaces have been variously labeled as the “digital ummah” (Bunt, 2009; Mernissi, 2004) “cyber Islamic environments” (Bunt, 2000; 2003) and the “virtual Islamic” (El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2010). Saunders (2008) casts the ummah as a nation based on the unified responses among Muslims to the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoon incident in which caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad rendered him as a terrorist. He also references universal rituals associated with Islam, such as hajj and salat that, he opines, connect Muslims to a nation-like community, similar to how cultural practices link groups within national territories. Saunders (2008) mainly concerns himself with “internet use...defining praxis of ummahism through its ability to facilitate information exchange

and perceived harmonization among dispersed and distinct communities of Muslims” (p. 313), although he frames these interactions as by-products of hostility against Islam in Muslim-minority societies. His approach demonstrates how scholars often focus on identity or geography—in this case, by referencing Islamophobic Muslim-minority societies, he is likely invoking Muslims in the West—to examine Muslim communities. This chapter, in contrast, includes contributions from participants from all over the world who are drawn into conversations regarding particular practices of Islam, demonstrating that the “digital ummah network” is more relevant to this discussion than conceptualizations of the ummah as a nation stemming from the Islamophobic West.

This chapter will not argue that the digital ummah is a coherent cyberpublic; it supports Varisco’s (2010) suggestion that the “idealized we-are-one Ummah” (p. 158) is unrealistic. It is possible to speak of the digital ummah not as a nation but as a network, which can be studied through topics and nodes that take shape within the larger context of fragmented digital ummah network. This network comes alive when confronted with certain events related to the lived experiences of Muslims but this does not necessarily imply that Muslims who engage in dialogue about these events and topics on either Muslim or non-Muslim sites agree on how the issues are framed or how the problematics should be addressed. In Bunt’s (2004) discussion of the “cyber Islamic environments,” he focuses mainly on websites oriented specifically to Muslims who adopt more or less conservative interpretations of Islam. Says Bunt (2004),

The Internet can highlight what is individual and distinct about different Muslim perspectives and communities. It may therefore serve to enhance dialogue and ideas of difference, countering those notions of homogeneity promoted on occasion both by non-Muslims and by Islamic “authorities” as part of a singular path of Islam—one that excludes marginalised groups, or alternative interpretations of Islam, such as those that are traditionally less political and more quietist in their outlook (p. 108).

In this statement, Bunt is mainly speaking to the facilely applied references to the homogenous Muslim community (singular) and to hermeneutical divides within Muslim communities that lead some Muslims to denounce other Muslims as heretics. However, his own methods may obscure the voices of Muslims who are not attracted to “authoritative” Muslim websites or those dedicated to “marginalized groups” both of which are likely exhibit tendencies toward homogeneity (and evidence of trolling by “others”), which will be discussed promptly.

This chapter analyzes two networks: first, the websites of the popular American cohort of hijabi fashion bloggers, part of a larger transnational network, which are principally dedicated to Muslims who agree on one practice they interpret as Islamic: veiling. However, their practice and discussions also disrupt preconceptions of veiled women because they apply a creative, fashionable outlook to the practice; and, second, everyday topical discussions within transnational cyberspaces related to queer Muslims. My data collection for Muslim lesbians was not actually far removed from Bunt’s (2003), although rather than focusing on the broad topic of “Islam” and a geographical location, I centered my analysis on the topic of “Muslim lesbians” and “LGBTQ Muslims” without geographical qualifiers. While the hijabi fashion network and the everydayness of discussions related to queer Muslims may be less influential than the websites operated by muftis, focusing on the websites of authoritative Muslims may very well obscure the diversity within and between Muslim communities, not all Muslims are drawn to these sites, and the cosmopolitan opportunities that are occurring within transnational spaces based on topics and practices. This obscurity is due to the propensity of networks to evolve toward greater homophily:

homophily means that cultural...or material information that flows through networks will tend to be localized. Homophily implies that distance in terms of social characteristics translates into network distance...It also implies that any social entity that depends to a substantial degree on networks for its transmission will tend to be localized in social space and will obey certain fundamental dynamics as it interacts with other social entities in an ecology of social forms (McPherson et al., 2001, p. 416).

The tendency toward homophily leads theorists, like O'Neil (2009), to argue that online spaces serve as "echo chambers" (p. 116). For this reason, I chose to analyze a homophilic network and another more heterogeneous topical network, although both are connected through Muslimness and specific practices. I will begin with the homophilic network of hijabi fashion bloggers in the next section.

Hijabi Fashion Network

Most Muslims agree that modesty is an important virtue in Islam but there is disagreement within Muslim communities about what modesty entails and how it should be practiced, even though muftis will often emphasize that all four schools of Islamic jurisprudence agree that women must cover their heads (Ali, 2010). Most of the women in the hijabi fashion dataset likewise agree that veiling is an obligatory practice for Muslim women; therefore, they believe that women who do not comply with this mandate are not practicing their faith correctly. For example, Elif Kavakci, who blogs and markets her line of sporty hijab at *Hijabitopia*, claims that wearing the hijab is *fard* (obligatory) for Muslim women:

When people say it is a choice, it makes my blood boil. There is no question! To wear or not to wear hijab is not an option. If you love Allah and want to please him, you wear it. If you don't wear it, that is a decision you make as a Muslim, not a choice.²¹³

Kavakci is putting the solidarity (read: homogeneity) of the (pro-hijab) ummah above the right of Muslim women to choose for themselves how they interpret the Qur'anic

²¹³ <http://hijabitopia.blogspot.com/2010/08/to-wear-or-not-to-wear-its-not-question.html>

mandate on modesty. She goes on to say that she does have unveiled friends but those closest to her have lifestyles that coincide with her own, which speaks to the hijab as a symbol that not only denotes modesty but also inclusion.

Other bloggers, like Asma Parvez of *Haute Muslimah*, acknowledge that Muslim women “have different levels of hijab,”²¹⁴ and they blog to encourage modesty without reinforcing parameters of inclusion based on the use of the hijab. Parvez claims that some women would wear her fashion ensembles “right out of the house,” while others might deem them appropriate for “women’s only events.” Similarly, when “Em” is asked if open-toed shoes are permissible, she responds that it is a “grey area,” meaning that not all Muslim women/hijabis consider the feet to be *awrah* (an intimate part of the body), although some hijabis consider the entirety of women’s bodies except her face and hands as *awrat*.²¹⁵ Parvez also states that hijab “is between that person and Allah” and women’s level of modesty is not for others to judge. Mariam Sobh of *HijabTrendz* makes a similar comment: “there are differences of opinion and some might feel that *hijab* is more of a code of conduct and a guideline for how Muslim women should behave. I personally understand it [veiling] as something that God wanted us to do.”²¹⁶ The first part of Sobh’s statement is inline with the arguments of some female Muslim scholars who do not interpret hijab as a head covering but as a behavior. Asma Barlas (2002), for example, claims that the true hijab is related to diverting one’s gaze from members of the opposite sex. Relatedly, Barazangi (2004) claims that the Qur’an would not have made distinctions between *awrah* and *zinah*, the latter of which is the parts of the female body that have

²¹⁴ <http://www.illumemagazine.com/zine/articleDetail.php?Blogger-Focuses-on-Hijab-Fashion-13325>

²¹⁵ <http://welovehijab.com/2009/11/26/hijab-101-hijabs-during-salah-at-home/>

²¹⁶ <http://www.hijabtrendz.com/2011/03/16/hijabtrendz-featured-islam/>

typically been adorned with jewelry (neck, ears, arms, and ankles), if the whole female body was considered *awrat*. This section has highlighted some of the principal debates related to modesty within Muslim communities. While hijabis mostly agree that the hijab is required, some acknowledge that there are differing perspectives on the parts of the female body that are considered “intimate” and that some Muslim women might believe that the mandate of modesty is more related to behavior than to the headscarf.

The next subsection, as well as the rest of the subsections related to the hijabi fashion network, will expand on these perspectives through one long thread with nearly 200 comments on the *We Love Hijab* blog, entitled “Hot Topic: Who’s Got A Problem With Hijab?”²¹⁷ This posting by “Kima” discusses the issue of the hijab serving as an instrument of exclusion within Muslim communities, citing an article from *Muslimette*, in which a commenter claims that other Muslims, especially unveiled women, are more opposed to the hijab than non-Muslims. While hijabis shared a variety of opinions on the subject, their comments suggest that their families and immediate communities pressure them to comply with more or less modest standards of dress to project a certain image of Islam or typology of Muslim. This categorizing, played out over women’s bodies, is related to the hierarchy of piety associated with modesty; in other words, Muslims sometimes believe that Muslim women’s practice of modesty, rendered as the headscarf, reflects their relative piety and by extension the extremism or liberalism associated with their religious beliefs, which are surmised as indicative of the beliefs of the larger community.

²¹⁷ <http://welovehijab.com/2010/02/26/hot-topic-whos-got-a-problem-with-hijab/>

Mapping the Hierarchy of Piety

The responses of Muslim women in regard to whether Muslims or non-Muslims have more of a problem with the hijab were fairly mixed but I will focus on the contestation related to hijab within Muslim communities. Several hijabis who have faced the scorn of other Muslims claimed that their family members were often the principal culprits. “Naemah,” (American), for example, writes,

I get more comments from other muslimah’s that don’t cover, particularly my family...I used to be one of them that disliked the hijab cause I thought it was unnecessary and represented oppression. That is basically what I have gotten from my family since I decided to cover.

Similarly “Neila” (French) claims that she does not veil due to “the reaction of...[her] parents.” “mermz,” a Pakistani expatriate, and “naba” (Pakistani) both state that there is a lot of anti-hijab sentiment in Pakistan and they have faced criticisms from their extended Pakistani families due to their practice of veiling.

Some families disagree with veiling among their wives and daughters because they think the hijab disrupts the “liberal Muslim” image of their communities. This interplay perhaps explains “Amy’s” conversation with an unveiled woman in which the latter claims that she does not veil because her husband threatened to divorce her if she does. Tellingly, a few hijabis, like “Farisha” and “siti hajar” (Malaysian), said that their families linked the hijab to Islamic extremism: “siti hajar’s” family even called her a Taliban. “Farisha” claims that she became distanced from her family because when she started veiling her family believed that she “became the “extreme” Muslim and not the “moderate or liberal” Muslim” typology that her family favors. Other Muslims tolerate the hijab but the niqab is considered extreme. A few niqabis, such as “Kulsoom” (Pakistani) and “Fatima,” said that they have gotten many negative comments about their practice of “extreme” veiling, mostly from other Muslims who do not believe that the

niqab has anything to do with Islam. For other Muslims, as “Zaynah” mentions, the hijab is not considered extreme if it is mixed with Western clothing rather than the abaya (the long, loose outer garment that women wear in public in the Gulf region and elsewhere). However, there were also a few comments that suggest that some family members encourage more modest standards of dress as well: “Ameenah Yasin” (American) and “Jasse” (European) mention that their husbands pressure them to dress more modestly in jilbab (abaya) and hijab, respectively. Likewise, “Waheeda Khalfan” says she was forced by her family to wear the hijab for almost ten years and she was thrilled to remove it when she gained enough independence to do so.

As the comments in the last paragraph suggest, particularly those offered by the niqabis, Muslim women are also pressured to conform to more or less modest standards of dress by their immediate communities. For example, a Muslim revert, “Inal” says that wearing the hijab has sometimes been hard for her, especially when other Muslim women criticize her for wearing it or not wearing it “to their particular specifications.” The specifications on modesty are often quite particular; notably, “Alize” says that when she went to a “Pakistani” party in the SF Bay Area, some girls tried to convince her to remove her hijab “indoors,” although these same girls called others wearing short sleeves “sluts.” The “specifications” are also highly localized, which results in contradictory opinions of coercive dictates on modesty even within particular Muslim subcultures. This contradiction is illustrated by the comments of two women from the “BAM” (Black American Muslim) community. While “Samira” believes that her BAM community encourages the use of hijab, “Shereece” claims that women in her predominantly Black Muslim community rarely veil and some have tried to discourage her from wearing it.

Local communities play a large role in devising highly localized standards of modesty, which influence how women practice modesty, toward projecting a specific typology of Islam. In certain localized communities, like “Shereece’s” BAM community, women are encouraged not to veil to reinforce a “liberal” image of Islam. Similarly, a Canadian woman of Egyptian descent, Rana, states, “I don’t have any hijabi friends, and I must say that is probably why I don’t wear one myself. Yes, society plays a huge part in your daily decisions.” “Deniz” articulates a like comment in regard to her largely immigrant Muslim community in Australia, which rejects veiling in order to foster its assimilation into the dominant culture.

As stated previously, Muslim families and localized Muslim communities often pressure Muslim women to dress more or less modestly because a woman’s outward expression of modesty is often linked not only to the her piety but also to the version of Islam embraced by her community. This may be due to what I call the “hierarchy of piety associated with modesty.” I developed this concept based on the French niqab ban debate between Eltahawy, a native informant spokesperson, and Ahmed, a niqabi (see Chapter 3). In this debate, Eltahawy argues that the niqab should be banned everywhere because modesty among Muslim women has created a hierarchy in which the piety of Muslim women is measured by how much of their body is covered or, in her words, disappears.²¹⁸ Thus the niqabi serves as the “pinnacle” of this hierarchy. Due to this connection between modesty and piety and the connection between piety and typologies of Muslims, linkages that are substantiated by the Williams and Vashi (2007) study (also see Ajrouch, 2004), women are trapped in dialectics involving their own beliefs, the necessity of conforming

²¹⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWJRam64dQY>
<http://www.monaeltahawy.com/blog/?p=467>

to the beliefs of localized communities, and identity politics related to typologies of Islam. As a result, the hijab becomes an instrument of exclusion to divide “liberal” Muslims from more “extreme” varieties, even within the same family, which also reinforces the girl/bad girl dichotomy mentioned in Chapter 4, which I will detail further in the next subsection.

This subsection has discussed the familial and communal pressures exerted on Muslim women to conform with various levels of modesty in an effort to reinforce homogeneity toward a certain typology or image of Islam, which is performed, in the cases of women, through the “hierarchy of piety associated with modesty.” The next subsection will discuss the extent to which Muslim women have internalizes this hierarchy and how they are stereotyped within Muslim communities based on whether or not they comply with the practice of veiling.

Internalized Hierarchy and Stereotypes of Hijabis

Due to the “hierarchy of piety associated with modesty,” Muslim communities tend to have certain expectations (stereotypes) of veiled women. In Egypt, where, based on the HarassMap dataset, one would expect that compliance with practice of veiling is not only acceptable but violently enforced, “Sanna” says, “i’m living in Egypt...most people tell me that i shouldn’t wear...[the hijab] b/c it doesn’t allow me to put make-up.” “Sanna’s” comment implies a stereotype of veiled women, similar to “Leila’s” assertion in Chapter 4 that people assume that she must be a “good girl” because she wears hijab. One of the stereotypes that “Leila” mentions, in conjunction with the good girl stereotype, is that people assume that her top priorities are marriage and childbearing. Another stereotype, based on “khadija’s” comment, is that hijabis perform all their *salat* (prayers).

She says, “My mom although she is very religious, ironically she doesn’t feel...[the hijab] is necessary. She is someone who never misses a salah [prayer singular] and she is kind-hearted,” implying that a woman as pious as her mother would be expected to veil. Based on the comments of some hijabis, the connection between modesty and piety is not only projected onto them but is also a dynamic that some Muslim women have internalized. For example, one hijabi, “Ameenah Yasin” (American) questions if her failure to wear jilbab makes her “less of a muslimah.” Another hijabi, “Naseha,” “as an insider” who used to have a problem with the hijab before she started wearing it herself, says as a formerly unveiled woman she used to have the impression that hijabis think that they are “superior” to unveiled women. This sentiment is also reflected in the comments of several other Muslim women who did not yet feel ready to commit to veiling because they want to improve their practice of Islam in other ways to make their outward piety (the hijab) mirror their less visible expressions of the faith. “khadija,” for example, says “I have already made up my mind to wear the hijab, but I want to get better with my prayers first...I thought it would be hypocritical to wear hijab, while not performing my salah consistently.” “khadija’s” comment emphasizes that, due to the hierarchy of piety, hijabis are assumed to be exemplary practitioners of the Islamic faith.

Although some hijabis appear to accept the hierarchy of piety associated with modesty, other Muslimahs have attempted to frustrate this connection between modesty and piety; for example, “Tina” mentions women who veil for cultural reasons and “Heba” claims that modesty can be expressed not only through the practice of veiling but also through other behaviors, such as diverting one’s gaze. “Heba,” goes on to cite a picture

that was circulated within the digital ummah network to argue against the good/bad, un/veiled muslimah binaries:

Many ulema and average muslims distinguish...[hijabis] as being pure and worthy of respect whereas...[unveiled women] are defined as unworth of respect...or just plain whores. Yet nobody finds this insulting. A picture of a lollipop has been widely circulated among muslims...Two lollipops, one has its cover on while the other does not and is [in] turn surrounded by insects. This is insulting and intolerance at its best.

Heba lays to grief the idea that only hijabis deserve respect and rejects the stereotype that unveiled women are “whores” who are trying to attract men (flies) by remaining uncovered.

Most of the commenters on this *We Love Hijab* thread were hijabis but a few unveiled women spoke up for their right not to be judged by other muslimahs for not conforming to this networked community’s standards of modesty. For instance, “Mya,” like “Heba,” rejects the notion that women choose not to cover in order to attract men and claims that veiling is a personal choice that does not necessarily speak to the piety of Muslim women. She writes,

I...do not wear a hijab and never will, I feel there is no need for it and THAT is just my personal choice...someone here said[, “[A woman who covers herself is showing that she isn’t a slave to men...” So...if a woman does Not cover herself...she is a slave to men?...If someone does not respect a muslim that does not wear the hijab...they are Ignorant.

“Mya” feels that she has a right to present herself however she sees fit without other Muslims judging her piety based on one practice that is not even among the five pillars of Islam, including shahada (the declaration of one’s belief in one God and that Mohammad was a Prophet), salat, Ramadan, hajj, and zakat (charitable offerings). The propensity of Muslims to judge women by their modesty first and foremost may contribute to “Forouhar23’s” annoyance that the hijab “seems to be the number 1 priority” of Muslims.

Returning to “Heba’s” statement that modesty can be expressed in various ways, some Muslim women take to task the idea that modesty begins and ends with the hijab. For example, “Soumaya,” an unveiled woman who interprets modesty in a more flexible way than some hijabis, explains her position:

a woman wearing Hijab attractively with much care spent on details has lost the point comparing [*sic*] to a woman who is not necessarily wearing Hijab, but dressed properly and respectfully, and is so discrete in color and way of walking and attitude that nobody notices her... So as not to fall into the stereotype of non-veiled Muslim women you’re talking about, I don’t think that Hijab is wrong or insulting, I just see a greater flexibility in it than let’s say, most women do.

“Soumaya” is not only stating the modesty goes beyond the headscarf but that hijabi fashion may contradict the overarching purpose of dressing modestly—to detract attention away from people’s bodies. Similarly, “Heba” writes that fashion does not often accommodate “the idea of being respected for one[‘]s mind” rather than for one’s “female attributes” and that it could actually contradict the objective of hijab.²¹⁹ Thus, even if women are wearing the hijab, they are not necessarily complying with the purpose of hijab, or modest behavior, which further frustrates the hijabi/unveiled binary that underpins the liberal/traditional typologies.

This section has outlined how some Muslim women have likely internalized the hierarchy of piety associated with modesty, while others are attempting to counter the tendency of Muslims to judge the morality of women based on whether or not they wear the hijab. Nonetheless, the hijab continues to demarcate boundaries related to piety and inclusion and contributes to the othering of Muslims by other Muslims. The next subsection will discuss features of this othering that are reinforced by conversations within homophilic networks. As stated earlier, the interplay of networks tends to draw

²¹⁹ I should emphasize the distinction between the terms “the hijab” and “hijab.” “The hijab” is synonymous with “the headscarf,” while the term “hijab” refers to the Islamic mandate on modesty more generally, which extends beyond articles of clothing.

people into discussions with others who already agree with them, reinforcing the “echo chamber” (O’Neil, 2009) dynamic, which perhaps undermines the ability of interlocutors within the echo chamber to empathize with divergent opinions and discourages the participation of those with oppositional viewpoints.

Traditional Homophilic Networks

Since these hijabis are promoting veiling through their blogs, they tend to reinforce each other’s belief regarding the issue; in other words, they encourage the belief that veiling is obligatory. Although hijabis clearly feel that unveiled women and other Muslims, including those in their immediate communities and families, judge them, hijabis discuss unveiled women in judgmental terms as well. For example, “CanadianMuslim” writes, “i dont understand why they [unveiled women] would not like to be recognized as a muslim, why dont they want to represent their ummah? If they were right[e]ous muslims they would want to...stand along side their muslim sisters.” She also says, “By wearing the hijab...you are saying “im a muslim and I am proud of it...” Some hijabis see the hijab as overt display of pride in Muslimness that bolsters the solidarity of the (pro-hijab) ummah and, due to this belief, they imply that unveiled women could be Muslims but not “proud” Muslims. Hijabis’ dedication to the solidarity of the ummah through promoting conformity with the practice of veiling was validated by the comments of a few hijabis and recent converts who said that the “Great Hijab Debate” (the debate as to whether or not the hijab is required by the Qur’an) creates confusion (see comments of “Kendriana,” “CanandianMuslim,” and “New Hijabi & Soon to be Convert”). For some of these hijabis and Muslim communities that promote the hijab, the hijab is an expression of pride and solidarity and detractors make it seem like Muslims

argue among themselves about religious tenets, which they do, but the (pro-hijab) ummah often attempts to gloss over disagreements such as this.

Due to the strong belief that the hijab is unquestionably required by Islam, which is reinforced by conversations among Muslims who agree with this tenet in homophilic networks, some hijabis believe that unveiled women actually recognize that it is required as well but choose not to wear it for various reasons. For instance, “Tina” says, “just because someone does not wear hijab and gives you a list of reasons for not wearing it doesn’t mean they don’t believe the hijab is a MUST.” A few unveiled women substantiate “Tina’s” point by stating that they want to veil but they are afraid of losing their jobs and/or facing discrimination (see comments by “Eleni” and “Jana”). Several hijabis offered long lists of “stupid excuses,” according to “um mautez,” that unveiled women feigned to justify their non-compliance with the practice of hijab (see comments by “heva,” “Maisah,” “Kima,” “Busana Muslim Modern,” and “Dhian”) but the hijabis dismissed these excuses as inconsequential, especially in comparison to the importance of exhibiting pride in the (pro-hijab) ummah. Since hijabis personally heard these excuses, they must have been conversing with unveiled women about the hijab but the former do not tend to consider that unveiled women might be uncomfortable saying that they do not believe that the hijab is required in the presence of a hijabs.

Several hijabis believed that these excuses were simply subterfuge for the desire of unveiled women to assimilate into dominant non-Muslim cultures; some comments of hijabis speculated that unveiled women were more concerned with fitting in than with their religion. For example, “Forouhar23” (European hijabi) states, “there are muslims who try to become more western, and therefore, leave their hijab behind.” Likewise,

“Rabbia” (American) says, “some [unveiled women] just want to be western and don’t care about what it means to be a muslim.” Assimilation is perceived in strictly negative terms by some hijabis as being a “proud” Muslim woman appears to require one’s overt affiliation with the faith. Some hijabis view non-compliance with the hijab as a result of fear of discrimination or a desire to assimilate but these hijabis often do not consider that unveiled women might have differing opinions on modesty. The hijabis’ unwavering belief that unveiled women actually know that the hijab is required allows them to bypass the possibility of divergent opinions on the hijab mandate and instead render non-compliance as dereliction of the faith to maintain the guise of uniformity in Islamic beliefs and practices. Divergent opinions, like “Heba’s,” emphasize that the Qur’anic mandate on the hijab (headscarf) is not as well defined as some hijabis make it out to be:

I personally believe Allah is much more tolerant than the average muslim. In the Quran Hijab is mentioned a handful of times, but nowhere in context with a woman’s dresscode [*sic*] or headgear or such. Modesty is subject to the context, time and environment we live in. Certainly a female can be modest without a headscarf.

Although a few comments like “Heba’s” made it onto the thread, the overwhelming majority, emboldened by the assenting crowd of the homophilic network, continues to advance the belief that the hijab mandate, the headscarf, that is, is uncontestable.

Since many hijabis view the hijab as mandatory and believe that the solidarity of the (pro-hijab) ummah is of utmost importance, they feel that it is their duty to “help” others correctly comply with the practice of hijab as one of their duties as Muslims to speak out against unIslamic practices within Muslim communities. “Ameerah,” for instance, claims that one of the reasons that women are not complying with the hijab mandate (the headscarf) is because “other Muslims aren’t reminding them to avoid wrong.” Some hijabis refute the idea that they are being judgmental of unveiled

women—many tend to see the disdain they face from unveiled women and other Muslims related to their use of the hijab as unidirectional—but their comments suggest that they are tolerant of the circumstances and opinions of unveiled women only to the extent that this tolerance may one day facilitate unveiled women’s conformity to the practice of veiling. For example, “new balance outlet” states that she is not saying that an unveiled woman is “bad” but that “she should open heartedly embrace, understand, and follow her religion.” Similarly, “Rabbia” states, “I did not mean to imply that any muslim woman who does not wear a hijab is a bad muslim...I just believe that if a muslim truly understands Islam they will recognize the significance of being modest.” Thus, to avoid being labeled as judgmental, like they accuse other Muslims of being, they suggest that it is their duty to correct unIslamic practices without articulating the label of “bad” Muslim; however, due to the hierarchy of piety, the branding of unveiled women as “bad” is implicit.

While hijabis may feel that they are helping unveiled women and fulfilling one of their duties as Muslims—to correct unIslamic practices within their community—unveiled women may not perceive these corrective admonishments as help. Some unveiled women reject this “help” and the judgment they face from hijabis for not conforming to the latter’s interpretation of modesty. For example, “zaida” says, “many muslims say bad things because I do not cover and that hurts. I love my religion but dont [*sic*] feel the need to cover.” Likewise, “ssg” (American) writes,

Some muslim sisters who do not wear hijab have also told me they have gotten a lot of negative comments from sisters who do cover, pressuring them to wear it...We need to remember that there is no coercion in religion...the act is meaningful because you do it based on our faith, not because someone forces you.

“ssg” also says that this pressure makes unveiled women want to cover even less. As I said before, dissenting views on veiling were not common on the thread in this homophilic network but they encouraged a few hijabi commenters to become introspective (or defensive) about how Muslims ascribe labels, such as “bad,” to other Muslims and how this tendency reflects on Muslim communities in general.

This subsection has discussed the paucity of dissent that finds its way into homophilic networks of practice. Hijabis tend to deny that the mandate on wearing the hijab is contested among Muslims, a perspective that is reinforced through discussing the topic with other Muslims who subscribe to the same belief. The last subsection will discuss vernacular cosmopolitan praxis within this thread. This praxis reflected viewpoints that were true to the commenters’ own beliefs but promoted tolerance of divergent interpretations even if these concessions could perhaps detract from the solidarity of the (pro-hijab) ummah.

Cosmopolitan Dialogue Within Networks of Practice

There were cosmopolitan stances expressed both by hijabis and unveiled women in this discussion. For example, one hijabi, “Mira,” says,

Wearing hijab takes a lot of strength and guts...Especially if you live in a Western non muslim country. I dont think we should put down the girls who dont wear it, just like those who dont wear it shouldnt put down the ones who do. We must always remember that Allah swt is the judge of human beings, not us.

“Mira” emphasizes that it is not the charge of Muslims to judge the practices of other Muslims. She does not abandon her own beliefs but promotes a space of tolerance for others to practice theirs as well. “Heba,” an unveiled European woman, writes,

My problem is not with what people wear or not, but rather the lack of tolerance extended to those who interpret the Qur’an differently. I also oppose the narrowminded catagorization between scarf wearing girls and those without...before we start demanding tolerance of others to let us dress as we deem fit, then the same tolerance of interpretation and understanding ones faith on an individual

[sic] level, should be extended muslim to muslim. Even when we dont understand each other or don't agree.

These women exhibit vernacular cosmopolitan praxis through remaining true to their own beliefs but calling on others not to judge divergent beliefs within the faith. Hijabis demonstrated that the hijab signifies their belief in Islamic modesty and pride in their Muslim identities but this practice also reflects their consumption of Islamic knowledge. Most of these hijabis likely consume traditional Islamic knowledge based on the centuries-old interpretations of male scholars. Significantly, like the mufti above suggests, among these scholars from all of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence, there is no disagreement regarding veiling, as all of them agree that it is obligatory. Similar to the anonymous commenter on Hina Khan's blog (see Chapter 4)—“let us stop trying to be jurists”—most of these hijabis do not likely believe that they have the credentials to interpret the Qur'an for themselves. In fact, only one comment out of nearly 200 included a verse from the Qur'an (33:59) to provide scriptural backing for the practice of veiling. The practice of hijab offline, reinforced through network solidarity online, establishes a technology of exclusion—hijabis can readily identify their “friends,” those who exhibit similar pride in the (pro-hijab) ummah. Likewise, the network itself is a technology of exclusion because dissenting opinions related to veiling are gradually weeded out of this homophilic network of practice.

The next section contrasts traditional Islamic truths regarding homosexuality with beliefs about queerness among Muslims who practice *ijtihad*, which has allowed queer “liberal” Muslims to reconcile their sexuality and their faith even though Muslims who rely on traditional Islamic knowledge consumption rebuff this practice. The data suggest positionalities that do not lean toward either the “traditional” or “liberal” camps, which

are more evident in studies of topical networks in transnational spaces than in studies related to homophilic networks.

Muslim Lesbians: *Ijtihad* or *Bid'ah*?

The first part of this section will frame approaches to the consumption of Islamic knowledge. As pointed out above, while some Muslims believe that they must rely on the interpretations of traditional jurists, other Muslims believe that they can engage directly with the Qur'an in order to develop interpretations that are more consistent with their understanding of overall liberatory intent of the text rather than advancing non-contextualized, verbatim passages.

Ijtihad is a process that some Muslims undertake to dispute what they believe to be misinterpretations of religious texts and to make sense of Islam in the current era. For example, "OneDivineLight" says *ijtihad* involves, "gathering all the ayat...to study not only the verses themselves, but the verses surrounding them and the words in each verse and the verses which are related"²²⁰: in other words, Islamic methodology (Mandaville, 2001). Irshad Manji was mentioned in Chapter 4 as a proponent of what the commenter referred to as the extremist liberal Muslim camp because Manji believes it is possible to reconcile Islam and queerness by promoting the revival of *ijtihad*, which she conceptualizes as "struggling to understand our world by using our minds...exercising the freedom to ask questions."²²¹ The "ijtihadists" unpack Qur'anic verses to make them more consistent with the merciful intent of the Qur'an (Wadud, 1999), which some Muslims believe is necessary to make sense of social phenomena that did not exist during

²²⁰ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/07/gay-and-muslim-islam-homophobia_n_2258802.html

²²¹ <http://blog.beliefnet.com/news/2011/09/bestselling-lesbian-muslim-author-says-her-mission-is-to-spark-discussion-debate.php>

the time of the Prophet. “Arash Naranghi,” for instance, states that *ijtihad* is necessary to revisit passages of the Qur’an that relied on the common beliefs of the time in which they were revealed to interpret them, such as common beliefs regarding homosexuality and slavery.²²² Similarly, “R.S.” says, “there was not [a] direct LGBT community during...[the Prophet’s] time so to try and place a modern development and understanding of alternative sexual lifestyles in the context of his time is a moot argument.”²²³ Hence *ijtihadists* believe that personal engagement with the Qur’an is necessary to reclaim Islam from traditional interpretations based on the widely held preconceptions of scholars from the 10th (or 13th) century CE, which I will discuss further in this chapter’s “Discussion.”

Muslims who agree that *ijtihad* is acceptable emphasize that religious beliefs are a personal matter that should not be subject to the consensus of the community. For example, “Sinan12’s” says, “I am gay and muslim...before you judge [*sic*] me...this is a matter between me and God and it is not for other people to interfere with.” Similarly, in reaction to an article about a lesbian leaving Islam because she could not reconcile her sexuality and her faith, “Imaan Ali” (British), says, “Her religion is between her and Allah...I don’t know why she left Islam.”²²⁴ Other commenters suggest that verbatim interpretations of holy texts often miss the overarching merciful intent of the religion that the texts are supposed to promote. For example, “Gail Coleman,” a revert, states, “I am glad to see that there are others who question tradition...if we never think beyond just the words in a book...we miss a lot. Faith should be a journey and it is not the same for any

²²² http://www.alternet.org/story/12817/to_be_gay_and_muslim

²²³ <http://gaymuslims.org/2011/02/20/marriage-fallacy/#comments>

²²⁴ <http://blog.beliefnet.com/news/2011/09/bestselling-lesbian-muslim-author-says-her-mission-is-to-spark-discussion-debate.php>

two people.”²²⁵ These comments suggest that personal affirmation of religious beliefs is central to faith and takes precedence over conforming to the practices of the majority of adherents.

While some people, like “Gail Coleman,” laud the efforts of Muslims who engage personally with religious texts, other Muslims believe that the solidarity of the ummah, based on traditional Qur’anic exegeses, is more important than acceptance of the resulting diversity of beliefs based on personal, critical reflections (*ijtihad*) on the Islamic scriptures. Rasheed Eldin, for example, discredits *ijtihad* by framing it as *bi’dah* (heretical religious innovations), particularly in regard to creating a space for “queer Muslim” identities. Says Eldin, “Just because someone has certain desires, that does not entitle them to re-write God’s religion according to those desires.”²²⁶ Eldin does not view *ijtihad* as an acceptable practice because it involves challenging the significant uniformity among traditional interpretations, which are also more widely accepted among Muslims. Likewise, “sjaent2001” says that freethinking lends to confusion, which is not in the best interest of the ummah,²²⁷ similar to the stance that some hijabis take on the Great Hijab Debate, although Manji claims that it is fundamentalism to deny individualism in Islam.²²⁸ Henry Makow, rejects Manji’s emphasis on individualism, which he believes is bred of an elaborate conspiracy to encourage female chauvinism and Zionism: “What better way to disinherit Muslims than encourage them to become “free thinkers” like . . . here in the West.”²²⁹ This controversy points to a pervasive theme that

²²⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/07/gay-and-muslim-islam-homophobia_n_2258802.html

²²⁶ <http://gaymuslims.org/2011/02/20/marriage-fallacy/#comments>

²²⁷ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/f-yusef/gay-muslims-the-elephant-in-the-prayer-room_b_2232263.html

²²⁸ https://www.irshadmanji.com/sites/default/files/news/IMspeech_99Oct.html

²²⁹ <http://www.savethemales.ca/000642.html>

threads throughout many of the datasets: the tension between the right to practice personal Islamic beliefs and the solidarity of the ummah. Although some Muslims, like Eldin, describe dedication to *ijtihad* as *bid'ah*, ijtihadists believe that the Qur'an commanded Muslims to engage in the practice with the first word of the Qur'an following the bismallah: *iqra* (read)²³⁰ (al-Hibri, 1997).

This section has framed various perspectives on one debate related to Islamic knowledge, the contested permissibility of Muslims interpreting the Qur'an for themselves. Some believe that *ijtihad* is both permissible and necessary to advance the liberatory intent of the Qur'an in the contemporary era, while others perceive it as heresy leveraged in an effort to undermine the solidarity of the ummah. The next subsection will frame traditional perspectives on queerness, which cast it as a curable "disease," and some strategies that Muslims have attempted to cure themselves of queer desires.

"Traditional" Perspectives

Traditional interpretations of the Qur'an typically render queerness as a "disease" that requires rehabilitation or punishment. For example, "Salma M. Ali" claims, "I think they just need help. Lesbianism and Gay-ness is honestly a disease to me." For Muslims who render queerness as a disease, they also believe that there must be a "cure" for it, typically involving prayer, psychiatric treatment, corporeal punishment, and/or heterosexual marriage. "guest-ljmalwa," for instance, says that LGBTQ Muslims should seek psychiatric treatment.²³¹ Another commenter, "Laila," who claims to have been tempted by same-sex attraction, states, "...you decide that...[your sexuality] is far more

²³⁰ <http://dailycaller.com/2011/07/28/gay-and-muslim-%E2%80%94-is-that-even-possible-one-imam-says-%E2%80%98yes%E2%80%99/>

²³¹ <http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2012/12/frances-muslims>

important to you than your own religion. Otherwise you would, as I have done, prayed to Allah (SWT) to remove these sinful thoughts.”²³² “Leila” is stating that Muslims can cure themselves of queerness if they pray enough, counting herself as an example of the effectiveness of this intervention. Other cures are enacted by the state in communities that do not accept queerness. “Samo Adtun,” a gay Yemeni man, says that in Yemen, queers are either killed or imprisoned until they “become straights.”²³³ “Shalabieh” claims that shock therapy is still practiced in Jordan, Egypt, and the KSA to “cure” queerness.²³⁴ Even in places where homosexuality is legal, like Turkey, honor killings and corrective rapes and beatings have occurred.²³⁵

Some queer Muslims believe that the best “cure” for their homosexuality is to marry a heterosexual. “Halim1814,” a gay Egyptian, writes that, although he has never acted upon his attraction to other men, he does not feel that he can change his sexual orientation toward same-sex attraction, which he calls a “sickness,” even though he has undergone therapy and prayed endlessly to “cure” himself. “Halim1814” asks for feedback on his idea of marrying a lesbian who would be able to sympathize with his own experiences.²³⁶ Some of the commenters (“Asiya,” “LastFriday,” and “Medievalist”) believe that he would do better to “cure” himself by marrying a heterosexual woman. However, “xyz” tells the story of a gay friend who followed similar advice from a doctor and he lived miserably with his wife for 20 years before divorcing her.²³⁷ Notably, all

²³² <http://gaymuslims.org/2011/02/20/marriage-fallacy/#comments>

²³³ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/07/gay-and-muslim-islam-homophobia_n_2258802.html

²³⁴ <http://www.7iber.com/2012/01/my-little-secret/>

²³⁵ <http://www.economist.com/node/21546002>

²³⁶ <http://www.ummah.com/forum/showthread.php?169640-Homosexual-Muslim-Gay-muslims-marrying-Lesbian-muslims>

²³⁷ <http://www.7iber.com/2012/01/my-little-secret/>

these “cures” involve queer Muslims rejecting their sexuality, thereby endorsing traditional Muslim communities’ denunciation of homosexuality.

Where does this dialectic leave queer Muslims who favor the solidarity of the ummah over personal faith? Some Muslims who rely on traditional transmissions of religious knowledge feel that they must choose between their queerness and their religious communities. Several of the articles and blog postings described professed Muslim queers as very pious in their traditionally-rendered Islamic practices, which frustrates the simple typologies of traditional/liberal and good/bad particularly in regard to the assumption that queer Muslims must be “liberal” Muslims. The narratives of a few Muslim lesbians suggest that they conformed to traditional practices before their sexuality and religion came to a head. “Zara,” a lesbian of Pakistani descent, left Islam because of her lesbianism but she has faced an enduring sadness as a result of this decision. The article about “Zara” states, “she was the most pious of all her siblings and always took her religion seriously.”²³⁸ Despite or perhaps because of her traditional strong faith, she believes that her sexuality conflicts with her Muslim identity. Says “Zara,” “There are people out there who think they can be Muslim and gay, and that’s great. But to me, that sounds the same as people who claim Islam but still drink or don’t practice it properly.” Another Muslim lesbian, “Aliyah Bacchus,” from a conservative Muslim family, who wore hijab and abaya throughout middle and high school and taught community courses on Islamic tenets, realized that she was queer in her late teens after she left her husband from an arranged marriage. She did not overtly distance herself from Islam, like “Zara,” but she did become estranged from her family and her Muslim

²³⁸ <http://www.shewired.com/lifestyle/2013/01/28/lesbian-muslim-unveiled-moving-forward-muslims-progressive-values>

community when she fell in love with a woman.²³⁹ The *Muslimah Media Watch* posting about “Aliyah” suggested that she moved away from her more traditional approach to Islam but it was unclear as to whether or not she left the faith altogether. Another article highlighted “Aliyah’s” tattoos and consumption of alcoholic beverages perhaps to suggest that she did leave Islam.²⁴⁰

“Zara” kept her queerness from her parents who found out that she was a lesbian when they read her diary. When they found out, they kept her under house arrest that included ritualistic verbal and physical abuse. “Zara’s” family supported her decision to leave Islam, or perhaps created the impetus for her to do so. Her family member told her as she was fleeing her forced imprisonment within the family home at the age of 19, “Don’t tell anyone you’re related to us. And please God, don’t tell anyone you’re Muslim.”²⁴¹ “Zara’s” story suggests that traditionalist lesbians may be comfortably accommodated by the closet unless their queerness inadvertently comes out. The desire to remain in the closet is understandable considering how some Muslim families, like “Zara’s,” react to the news that their children are queer, which typically involves the aforementioned “cures” or the families disowning their queer offspring. A blog posting about “Reviva,” a Muslim lesbian in the United Kingdom, relays similar patterns of familial abuse to which “Zara” was subjected. “Reviva” recounted the “cures” her family imposed upon her, including exorcisms, physical and mental abuse, forced confinement, and several attempts to marry her off to foreigners without her consent. Similar to

²³⁹ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mmw/2009/01/aliyahs-choice-the-la-times-profile-of-a-lesbian-muslim/http://articles.latimes.com/2008/dec/17/nation/na-muslimgay17>

²⁴⁰ <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/dec/17/nation/na-muslimgay17>

²⁴¹ <http://www.shewired.com/lifestyle/2013/01/28/lesbian-muslim-unveiled-moving-forward-muslims-progressive-values>

“Aliyah’s” case, the family of a gay Jordanian, “H,” threatened to disown him and throw him out of the house when his mother discovered the gay websites he had been reading in an attempt to “cure” himself of his homosexual desires. Thus it appears that queer Muslims from traditional families must keep their sexuality a secret to prevent their ostracism from the home and from their religious communities.

Nonetheless, the familial reactions are perhaps more merciful than the prescriptions of larger traditional Muslim communities. Several commenters connect the suitable punishment for homosexuality, the stoning of gays and lesbians, to the fate of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Similarly, “Huzaifah” and “al Zayn” share a hadith narrated by Ibn Abbas, which states that gay men should be thrown from the highest point of the city and stoned.²⁴² Another commenter relays the hadith that Muslims should “turn [effeminate men]...out of...[their] houses” (Bukhari 72:774).²⁴³ In all of these proposed penalties, public discipline (Foucault, 1977) is enacted upon a wayward member of the group by the community or the state rather than Allah to reinforce the social norm that such behavior is an affront to the community and to prevent others from similar lapses in judgment, which consumers of non-traditional religious knowledge argue is contrary to Islam because such discipline appropriates the sole prerogative of Allah to judge and punish and places it within the hands of the community. This dissention from consumers of non-traditional religious knowledge also speaks to whether or not the social policing of sexuality within Muslim communities—not simply the policing of non-heteronormative sexuality, but also that spinsters and Muslim women in general—should be condoned. Public discipline implicitly casts the sexuality of Muslims

²⁴² <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?98857-Muslim-Gays-and-muslim-Lesbians>

²⁴³ <http://gaymuslims.org/2011/02/20/marriage-fallacy/#comments>

as public rather than private; in other words, spinsterhood, pre-marital sexual relations, dating, female virginity, marriage, and familial configurations (polygyny, for example) within Muslim communities are all issues that are considered open to communal discussion and consensus.

Muslims who oppose queerness cite a few verses from the Qur'an to substantiate the prescribed punishments mentioned above: 11:82 and 26:165-6. The first verse discusses the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah due to men calling on Lot to send out the angels, disguised as boys, so that the men could satisfy their lust. Allah is said to have lifted up the city from the ground and sent it crashing back to the earth (Sadia et al., 2011). The second verses state that men who lie with "men" as they do with women are "transgressing limits." Although the Qur'an does not stipulate any punishments for those who transgress these limits and it does not mention lesbianism at all (Murray, 1997), it stands to reason that homosexual relations would be considered a form of *zina* (extramarital sexual relations) because, traditionally speaking, gay marriage is not tolerated and, therefore, sexual relations between same-sex couples could not be accepted as legitimate within traditional Muslim communities. Based on the limited number of passages in the Qur'an that broach homosexuality and the divergent interpretations of these passages, which I will discuss below, it is difficult to argue that the Qur'an unquestioning calls for the death of queer Muslims, so Muslims who consume traditional religious knowledge often substantiate the condemnation and corporeal punishment of gays and lesbians through the ahadith cited previously.

This subsection has discussed Muslim approaches to queerness based on the consumption of traditional religious knowledge, which normally renders homosexuality

as a disease that should be cured because, in “traditional” Muslim communities, sexuality is cast as a public, communal issue. Therefore, queer Muslims who consume traditional religious knowledge are often forced to choose between their religion and sexuality. The next subsection will highlight “liberal” Muslim perceptions of queerness, some of which are underpinned by the practice of *ijtihad*. Through engaging directly with the Qur’an, some Muslims feel that they are able to make sense of modern-day social phenomenon that were not prevalent during the time of the Prophet.

“Liberal” Perspectives

As mentioned above, a few commenters suggested that, since a LGBTQ community did not exist during the time of the Prophet, Muslims can either take up the issue through connecting it to other parallel issues that are addressed in the Qur’an or they can attempt to reinterpret accepted truths based traditional interpretations. For example, some “traditional” interpretations render homosexuality as synonymous with lewdness. However, “OneDivineLight” attempts to correct this misconception:

Islam is against "lewd" behaviors not normal sexuality. Lewd and homosexual are not synonyms. A same gender couple who have a mature, respectful relationship are not lewd. Lewd...is everyone getting naked in the streets in a way that disrespects others. What happens in a home between a loving couple is between the couple. Quran requires 4 people witness the actual penetration to make an accusation of [lewdness].²⁴⁴

S/he is attempting to demonstrate that traditional interpretations of the Qur’an have wrongly stretched the concept of lewdness, a crime punishable by 100 lashes if it is witnessed by four people (there is no mention of stoning), to reinforce prejudices against queerness. Barlas (2002) substantiates this commenter’s claim that public sexual acts were not uncommon during the *Jahiliya* (pre-Islamic) period, thus the Qur’an prescribes

²⁴⁴ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/07/gay-and-muslim-islam-homophobia_n_2258802.html

an equally public punishment but it should not be embellished to the point of warranting death, particularly to punish people who do not engage in public sexual acts.

“OneDivineLight” also asks Muslims to ruminate on how “private” consensual relations between adults affect them. This topical network allowed the space for people to reflect on “OneDivineLight’s” suggestion. Several Jordanians spoke out in favor of “H’s,” the gay Jordanian whose parents threatened to disown him, right to engage in sexual relations with whomever he would like. For example, “Madian” writes, “He has the right to...practice his private...sexual life freely within his own closed doors as by the laws of this country.”²⁴⁵ Similarly, a queer Jordanian, “Enchanted Fairy,” claims, “whoever you have in your bed by the end of the day is up to you not the entire world!”²⁴⁶ Attempting to render Muslim sexuality as a personal rather than communal issue may be one of the most trying issues facing the consumers of “liberal” religious knowledge but even some Muslims who lean toward consumption of traditional religious knowledge may agree that sexuality should be situated as a private matter.

While “OneDivineLight” disputed lewdness as synonymous with homosexuality, other Muslims introduce divergent interpretations of the same Qur’anic passages that other Muslims use to condemn queerness, such as 11:82 and 26:165-6 mentioned above. Non-traditional interpretations of the first verse stress that fact that the angels in the story of Lot were disguised as beautiful, young boys. Ijtihadists also claim that the other verses, 26:165-6, related to men lying with other “men,” have also been interpreted as men lying with boys. Thus consumers of non-traditional religious knowledge believe that these

²⁴⁵ <http://www.7iber.com/2012/01/my-little-secret/>

²⁴⁶ <http://www.7iber.com/2012/01/my-little-secret/>

verses are rejections of child rape and pedophilia rather than of consensual sexual relations among gay men.

Muslims who promote tolerance of Muslim queerness do not often mention ahadith perhaps because, even among consumers of traditional Islamic knowledge, the proposition that authentic ahadith should be granted equal weight to the Qur'an is contested. The relative weight that the ahadith should be granted in guiding Islamic practices was mentioned in several of the datasets; some Muslims believe that the Qur'an and ahadith should be given equal weight in interpreting Islamic beliefs and practices, while others believe that the ahadith are of little or no consequence. Some ijihadists disregard ahadith in general, particularly those that contradict the Qur'an. For example, the commenters who cite the ahadith calling for the stoning of homosexuals fail to acknowledge Qur'anic passages that counter them: 4:16, for example, which states, "And the two who commit it among you, dishonor them both. But if they repent and correct themselves, leave them alone. Indeed, Allah is ever Accepting of repentance and Merciful."²⁴⁷ This verse is referring to homosexual relations between two men, but instead of stipulating that the men should be stoned, as the ahadith suggest, it says they should repent and be forgiven.²⁴⁸ Although this verse does imply that Muslims should reject queerness, passages of the Qur'an do not command that queers be put to death because they would be incapable of penitence if they were dead.

Another traditional rejection of homosexuality is advanced due to the importance of procreation that is articulated by the Qur'an. Eldin, for example, cites 16:72: "And Allah has given you spouses (*azwaj*) of your own kind, and has given you, from your

²⁴⁷ <http://quran.com/4/16>

²⁴⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gay_muslims

spouses, sons and grandsons, and has made provision of good things for you.”²⁴⁹

Although Eldin acknowledges that the word *azwaj* denotes “the opposite parts of a pair,” he also believes that the only way to interpret “opposite” is in terms of gender. In response, “S,” a Muslim lesbian, questions, “How would you feel if you cant [*sic*] be with your partner that you love?” “S” goes on to say, “[*nikah*] is a vow...not [to] commit infidelity and that you will love that person through the good and bad and what is wrong if two women or men want to do it in the way of Islam?”²⁵⁰ Like “S,” Daayiee Abdullah, a well known queer imam, says, “By not allowing same-sex couples to wed, there is a direct attack on the Qur'an's message that each person has a mate who is their 'comfort and their cloak.”²⁵¹ Abdullah reasons that the Qur'an does not only use the term *azwaj* (“mate”) in reference to husbands and wives and it purposefully employs gender-neutral language to counter the limited interpretation of the word to denote a male-female pair.²⁵² “Liberal” Muslims, like Abdullah, who have reconciled their faith with their sexuality, believe that queer *nikah* (religious marriage) must be accepted within Muslim communities due to Qur'anic sanctions on extramarital sexual relations. Abdullah adds, “Islamic jurisprudence of ancient lore prevents samesex couples from marrying by making it a legal impossibility...not that two samesex cannot wed before witnesses and Allah,”²⁵³ which is what *nikah* entails. Furthermore, since *nikah* allows for Muslim marriages to be recognized by the community without the involvement of legislation, if

²⁴⁹ <http://gaymuslims.org/2011/02/20/marriage-fallacy/#comments>

²⁵⁰ <http://gaymuslims.org/2011/02/20/marriage-fallacy/#comments>

²⁵¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12486003>

²⁵² <http://www.pridesource.com/article.html?article=57953>

²⁵³ <http://dailycaller.com/2011/07/28/gay-and-muslim-%E2%80%94-is-that-even-possible-one-imam-says-%E2%80%98yes%E2%80%99/>

Muslim communities become more accepting of queerness, this could allow for an extension of queer rights beyond those attribute to law in some Western nations.

While some “liberal” Muslims are fighting to secure the right to nikah for queer Muslims, others just want a space to be who they are and find support from others like them. Some Muslim lesbians are able to guard their secret and use the internet to anonymously reach out to others who are in similar situations so they do not have to choose between their sexuality and their religion or face ostracism of their families, which appear to be tendencies among “traditional” Muslims. In one posting, “shim099” confesses her attraction to other women, concluding the posting with the following statement: “i can’t believe I just admitted all this.”²⁵⁴ In reply, “imjustfine” states, “I think it is really good that you did admit it if not here than where?” Similarly, a Pakistani lesbian states that it is impossible for her to come out due to the homophobic climate of her local community so she relies on the internet to connect with others for support and to form relationships. These comments suggests that Muslim lesbians are using social media as spaces for mapping out queer Muslim subcultures and to reach out to others like them in contexts in which it may be unsafe to do so offline. The internet provides a space for “virtual coming out,” subtle resistance against pervasive heteronormativities found in every culture.

Some of the Muslim lesbians who came out virtually were understandably worried about how their families would react to their queerness, perhaps in light of the stories that they might have read about other Muslim lesbians, like “Zara.” In one posting, a Muslim lesbian shares her narrative about coming out to her parents, which resulted in

²⁵⁴ <http://www.experienceproject.com/stories/Am-A-Closet-Lesbian/1462345>

her being thrown out of her house, to warn other women not to do the same unless they were financially secure enough to live on their own.²⁵⁵ One Muslim lesbian states that she has never told anyone about her queerness because she believes if she did her family make sure that not even “her ashes” were found, emphasizing the possibility of violence against queers in her community.²⁵⁶ Another Muslim lesbian solicits advice on mitigating her family’s anxiety about to her failure to marry. This last comment suggests a connection between Muslim spinsterhood and lesbianism and, although there were few linkages articulated in either of the datasets, this could be another explanation for some Muslim women remaining single.

Similar to this Muslim lesbian who accepted her queerness and was resisting heterosexual marriage, others attempt to maintain a “traditional” Islamic lifestyle without denying their sexual proclivities through “marriages of convenience.” One article discusses “Syed Mansoor,” a devout Muslim of Indian descent, who is among nearly 400 gays and lesbians who were attempting to maintain both their Islamic and queer lifestyles through posting personals on a South Asian websites to find LGBTQ Muslims of the opposite sex to marry.²⁵⁷ Unlike “Halim1814,” they are not proposing these marriages of convenience to “cure” themselves but to stay in the closet to their friends and relatives. Muslims, like Mansoor and the lesbians who virtually come out, have come to terms with their queerness and do not perceive it to be incompatible with their Muslim identities but they stay in the closet because larger (traditional) Muslim communities may not be ready

²⁵⁵ <http://emptyclosets.com/forum/anonymous-discussions/60466-muslim-lesbian.html>

²⁵⁶ <http://www.experienceproject.com/stories/Am-A-Closet-Lesbian/1462345>

²⁵⁷ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/23/AR2006062301417.html>

to accept them and they are concerned by how their communities and families might react to disclosure of their homosexuality.

This subsection has discussed “liberal” Muslim perspectives on queerness. These Muslims are mainly attempting to normalize the queer Muslim identity through debunking the supposed Qur’anic rejection of queerness. They are also trying to create a space to discuss queer nikah because, they argue, that Muslims should have a right to practice their sexuality within Islamically sanctioned relationships. The next subsection will discuss perspectives that are not easily accommodated by either of these two typologies discussed above, “traditional” or “liberal.”

Middle Ground Perspectives

Some of the perspectives I encountered in the dataset were not easily accommodated by either “liberal” or “traditional” typologies but I would argue that the same is true of the other two perspectives outlined here; consumption of traditional or liberal religious knowledge in absolute term is likely difficult to maintain. For instance, although the Qur’an does not definitively proscribed slavery, it is unlikely that any Muslim would argue that it is an acceptable practice. Among the perspectives that were difficult to compartmentalize as either “liberal” or “traditional,” some Muslims believe that engaging in homosexual acts is a “sin” but they do not necessarily believe that same-sex attraction is unnatural, which perhaps sets their beliefs apart from other religions that believe it is unnatural and a sin to even desire others of the same sex. According to Rasheed Eldin, “A person will only be rewarded or punished according to what they CHOOSE to do, not how they were made.”²⁵⁸ Similarly, “Opinionopinion59” states,

²⁵⁸ <http://gaymuslims.org/2011/02/20/marriage-fallacy/#comments>

“Saying you feel that you were born with a homosexual orientation is one thing and engaging in homosexual acts is another (a big sin).”²⁵⁹ Thus, despite a Muslim’s queer tendencies, she can remain a respectable part of the community if she refrains from acting upon her desires. This middle ground perspective varies from traditional Muslim perspectives, which cast queerness as a disease, and from “liberal” Muslim viewpoints that promote the unconditional acceptance of queerness and queer relationships, even queer Muslim marriages.

Muslims who demonstrate a middle ground approach frame queerness as a *jihad*, a personal struggle, for which Muslims, who refrain from acting upon their desires, will be rewarded. For example, Husnaa, says, “Allah made people gay/lesbian in the same way he made people blind, deaf, athletes, good at math... The test for them is to not commit zina.”²⁶⁰ “Barbara0309” offers a similar comment:

...everyone on this earth is given a test. It could be illness, the death of a child, money... If you stick fast with God's laws... you will be rewarded in the next life; if you act upon your carnal/earthly desires, you will be punished.²⁶¹

It should be noted that the Muslims who believe that queer Muslims will be punished for acting on their desires also reject the idea that they are exhibiting homophobia by standing up for “God’s laws,” which is analogous to the beliefs of some hijabis who opined that it was their duty to “help” unveiled women by telling the latter that they are not adequately complying with an Islamic mandate. “Husnaa’s” comment, however, reinforces the claim of some “liberal” Muslims, like Abdullah, who argue that queer nikah must be allowed so that queer Muslims would have the right engage in Islamically permissible sexual relations.

²⁵⁹ <http://www.7iber.com/2012/01/my-little-secret/>

²⁶⁰ <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?98857-Muslim-Gays-and-muslim-Lesbians>

²⁶¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/07/gay-and-muslim-islam-homophobia_n_2258802.html

These middle ground Muslim perspectives appear to be contending with scientific evidence that homosexuality is a natural tendency and with the widely accepted infallibility of Allah as the creator of all people; in other words, these Muslims cannot argue either that queerness is unnatural or that Allah made a mistake by creating lesbians. Traditional Muslims sidestep this issue by calling it a psychological disorder or a disease, which was not created by Allah. In contrast, the middle ground perspective frames it as *jihad*, which underscores that it is a queer Muslim's deeds rather than her natural tendencies that will determine her rewards and punishments in the next life. While middle ground Muslim perspectives accept queerness as natural, they take issue with Muslims who attempt to identify as both queer and Muslim because they see queerness among Muslims as a *jihad* that Muslims should resist rather than as intersectional identities that could be reconciled, as liberal Muslims suggest. Thus, although queerness is inscribed on the body, as is identity, Muslimness is not based on who a person is but instead on what she does. For these Muslims, saying, "I am Muslim and I want to sleep with people of the same sex" is very different from saying "I am a queer Muslim." As such, they may view the entrance of "queer Muslims" into online and physical spaces as a blow to Islam, due to the collusion of identity and practice, while they believe that piety should be strictly related to practice.

Cosmopolitan Dialogues on Muslim Queerness

Queer rights are not only international issues but they also present cosmopolitan opportunities—in this case, for example, several activists employ the Qur'an to argue for the acceptance of queerness, including marriage equality. Some approaches to queer rights may support personal rights but they do not advance local or international queer

rights that are part of the nexus of cosmopolitanism. Some commenters told “H” that he should emigrate to a Western country, while “Sorab Shroff” claims that “H” might also be subjected to violence in Western nations, just as he was as a (racialized Muslim) gay in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, “aramramwebtv,” “Ahmad Al-Sholi,” and “Fadi Zaghmout” encourage “H” to stay in Jordan and work toward tolerance for the Jordanian LGBTQ community. “Ahmad Al-Sholi” writes, “I would want you to stay not only for yourself, but for all of us, for the kind of society that we would want to live in...we stand second/next to you...by taking it in as a struggle for a free and liberal person.” “Fadi Zaghmout” suggests that it may be more difficult for “H” to come out to his parent than to leave Jordan, but the former option would be the first step in creating a more tolerant society. These comments demonstrate support for both local and international queers rights, including those within Muslim-majority communities, which is more inline with vernacular cosmopolitan praxis than the implication that tolerance of queerness is only possible in the West.

Muslims who take middle ground approaches also demonstrate vernacular cosmopolitan praxis by remaining true to their own beliefs but exhibiting tolerance for others to do the same. “ThePillarOfAutumn,” a British Muslim, writes, “I’d say homosexuality is unnatural...it isn't something that should be encouraged but neither should it be discriminated against since people's sexual lives are part of their own private sphere.”²⁶² S/he also says,

As for Gay marriage, if the population wants it then why not?... It's something I find odd and don't understand but I feel the same way about all sets of beliefs that aren't my own and am in no position to enforce mine upon anybody else... Gay couples can't have children maybe they'll adopt some of those orphans who would otherwise be rotting away on the streets or receiving a lack of parental love in an orphanage.

²⁶² <http://orbala.blogspot.com/2012/09/muslim-lesbians-interactions-with-other.html>

“PillarOfAutumn” does not him/herself agree with queerness but suggests that it does no harm to others and may actually address an important concern of the Qur’an—a concern that some Muslims use to justify the practice of polygyny—the welfare of orphans.

Similarly, “Muslim Brother,” writes,

The beauty of Islam is that there are many facets to its people, the way they practice, the way they interpret the Quran...As far as the nikkah is concerned, it’s not my business, but it’s still better than sleeping around. It’s two grown adults in good conscience making a commitment of fidelity to one another. To me that’s better than the alternative.²⁶³

This quote frames some of the issues at stake for queer Muslims: the choice between disregarding injunctions against extramarital sex or facing the scorn of some Muslims for having a queer nikah; and personally engaging in hermeneutics to develop interpretations that are aligned with what a person believes to be the intent of the Qur’an or relying on the interpretations of men who have been dead for centuries. Cosmopolitan aesthetics imply that Muslims remain true to their own beliefs, while understanding that other Muslims must have the right to do the same, despite the possibility that divergent beliefs could detract from solidarity (read: homogeneity) of the ummah.

Discussion

These networks of practice demonstrate the dialectic between consumption of traditional knowledge and the solidarity of the ummah and the exercise of personal faith adopted at times through the practice of *ijtihad*. This dialectic also includes Muslims who take middle ground approaches, such as those who contextualize religious tradition in contemporary social phenomenon, which are often missed in studies of homophilic networks. It may be overly simplistic to cast these divergent beliefs as typologies because inter-Muslim disagreements are often based on their understandings of Islamic

²⁶³ <http://gaymuslims.org/2011/02/20/marriage-fallacy/#comments>

knowledge and, as such, more related to practices than identities. For instance, would “PillarOfAutumn” fall into the category of a “traditional Muslim” because s/he believes that homosexuality is unnatural or would s/he fit more comfortably into the category of “liberal Muslim” because s/he is not against queer nikah?

“Liberal Islam” is not a straightforward concept among scholars who have attempted to frame it. For example, Filali-Ansary (2003) casts Fazlur Rahman as a proponent of “liberal Islam” because he criticized orthodox Islam for its inability to address modern norms. However, Rahman (1986) was not “liberal” on all issues; he posits, for example, that the Prophet did not prohibit women from attending congregational prayers but he clearly preferred that women pray at home. Conversely, Al-Hibri (1997) cites the narrative of a woman who stood up in the mosque and said to Caliph Omar “you shall not take away from us what God has given us” when the caliph attempted to put a ceiling on the amount that women’s families could request in mahr—similar to the proposal of officials in the Gulf states in an effort to reduce the cost of marriage and discourage spinsterhood (see Chapter 4). Caliph Omar conceded to this woman’s point. This woman was not only at the mosque but she confronted the leader of the Muslim community, informing him of women’s God-given rights. Thus it appears that Rahman is trapped in the orthodoxy he accused others of in regard to women’s rights, particularly in light of the works of female Muslim scholars who have demonstrated that women played an active role in the first Muslim community, including the mosque, and served as important transmitters of religious knowledge (Mernissi, 1991). This exchange between the caliph and the Muslim woman who stood up for the rights of women highlights an important aspect of Islamic knowledge that some Muslims suggest has been

undermined for centuries due to the monopoly of the male ulama over its accumulation: debate (Bowen, 2004).

Kort recognizes the similar incoherence between Maududi's supposed liberalism and his traditional approach to gender relations. Maududi, for example, agrees with interpretations of the verse 4:34 that grant husbands the right to lightly beat their wives (Kort, 2005, p. 373). Maududi (1976) also equates the decline of civilizations with their granting "undue freedom upon the fair sex." Based on Maududi and Rahman's myopic views on the status of women perhaps their interpretations are more appropriately framed as "neotraditionalist" (Kort, 2005; Wadud, 1999). While male scholars might be progressive on other issues, their positions on women's rights tend to be the slowest to evolve. To add to Kort's (2005) discussion, Wadud's (1999) interpretation of verse 4:34 is that men should leave, not beat, their wives for *nushuz* (traditionally rendered as "disobedience," eventually leading to the beatings), which she interprets as infidelity (p. 74-75).

In several pieces, the modern West appears to hold a monopoly on "liberal Islam" (Filali-Ansary, 2003; Cliteur, 2011). Yet, although queer Muslims would likely be grouped into the liberal camp, in addition to multiple queer Muslim websites originating in the Arab region and various films dedicated to the narratives of queer Muslims throughout the world, some of the commenters in the dataset were queers based in Muslim-majority countries. The contributions of non-Westerners to the topic of LGBTQ Muslims in transnational cyberspaces dispute the notion that tolerance, illustrated by the comments of Jordanians in relation to "H's" situation, and positions of alterity are limited to the West. In contrast, American hijabi fashion bloggers did not appear to conform to

the principles of liberal Islam, despite the blog postings emanating from supposed epicenter of liberal philosophy. Hijabi fashion blogger should not, however, be perceived as the most traditional among their Muslims counterparts; as a few of the commenters suggested, staying abreast of the latest styles and paying acute attention to one's appearance can often detract from a Muslim woman's dedication to modesty being that she is accentuating her feminine attributes. My point is that it is too easy to fall into the trap of the East-West divide regarding the tolerance of Muslims, the same divide that tacitly informs discussions of cosmopolitanism. As Turner (2007) says, "Generalizations about Islam in terms of traditionalism and reformism are notoriously dangerous and unreliable" (p. 124). He offers the example of Wahhabi-influenced reform movements in Indonesia that were expected to result in a contraction of gender rights but this expectation never materialized (Turner, 2007). It is perhaps appropriate to say that nearly all Muslims are moderate but they have more or less conservative perspectives on various issues based on their understandings of religious knowledge.

Despite scholarly attempts to geographically situate diffuse approaches to Islamic authority over knowledge, Safi (1997) argues that progressive Muslim reformists are neither limited to North America nor are their contributions a very recent phenomenon. He argues that liberal Islam has "150-year-old tradition," noting important reformers, such as al-Afghani, Rida, Iqbal, and, again, Rahman makes the list. Roy (2012) concedes to the geographical dispersion of liberal Islamic thought but he does recognize it as a modern phenomenon. In his discussion of post-revolutionary politics in the Arab region, he points out the important role that Salafism has played in encouraging popular demands for the secularization of governance. Says Roy (2012), "The young [in the MENA

region] are more individualistic and less prone to feel the pull of holistic ideologies, whether Islamist or nationalist... The new generation calls for debate, freedom, democracy, and good governance” (p. 8-9) without rejecting their religiosity. He does not relate this to “liberal Islam” but instead to greater personal attachment to religion: “The usual religious authorities... have largely lost their legitimacy amid the rise of self-appointed and often self-taught religious entrepreneurs. Young “born-again” Muslims have found their own way by surfing the Internet and joining peer groups” (Roy, 2012, p. 10). Nonetheless, Roy’s (2012) discussion of “born-again” Muslims is not far removed from how other scholars render liberal Islam. Aras (2004), for example, states that “liberal Muslims” promote secularity and personal religiosity, which does not conflict with Roy’s framing of the “born-again” Arab Muslims.

To discuss what qualifies or not as liberal Islam one must look at the concepts of authority, ummah, and *ijtihad*. John Bowen (2004) argues that since Muslim populations, which make up the ummah, and political and religious authority have historically been geographically dispersed, Muslim are bound to the ummah through rituals (also see Hirschkind 2001), such as salat and hajj. He also claims that “Transnational Islam” tends to encourage Muslims to seek out the highest religious authorities to guide their practices; one of the qualifying characteristics of these authorities is that they are typically well-versed in classical Arabic (Bowen, 2004) and it appears that often, in the contemporary, hyper-connected world, they tend to cite other acknowledged authorities to reinforce their own hermeneutics (Ali, 2010).

However, while the religio-political boundaries of Muslim populations have historically been dispersed, religious knowledge has not been. Mandaville (2001) points

out that the reliance on oral transmission of scriptures and interpretations of them have “allowed ulama...to maintain a virtual monopoly over the production of authoritative religious knowledge” (p. 176; also see Mandaville, 2007). Furthermore, according to al-Hibri (1997), some mujtahids (religious scholars) maintained close relationships with the political establishment and those who dissented faced intimidation and torture; thus, although political encroachments impacted religious authority, it was also reliant on popular support. As Turner (2007) argues, “the authority of the mullah...was based on...a local, discursive and popular form of authority ” (p. 119). He goes on to say that popular support was based on the ulama’s ability to offer sound advice, but this point could also be read as the ulama maintaining popular authority through his ability to substantiate already deeply held beliefs within a community. In other words, the ulama draws from community norms through his socialization to offer his rulings/advice, which reinforce his popularity, and the preconceived beliefs of the community become underpinned with religious authority through his approval of them. In contrast, if the ulama attempted to normalize Muslim queerness in a homophobic community, for example, he would undoubtedly risk the legitimization of his credentials within that community. Popular religious authority has also contributed to the second-class status of women in most Muslim-majority countries, al-Hibri (1997) argues, by substantiating widespread misogyny through traditional interpretations of Qur’anic verse, such as 4:34. Says Al-Hibri, “they utilized the Stereotype and their...power to assert the automatic *qiwamah* [(superiority)] of all men” (p. 34) rather than their complementarity to their wives and women in general. Based on this traditional model of religious authority, only the mujtahids have the authority to engage in *ijtihad* and, although there are various

opinions in regard to when the “gates of *ijtihad* closed,”²⁶⁴ few tend to dispute the notion that the gates were closed.

Similar to Roy’s (2012) discussion, Mandaville (2001) states that, beginning with the ready availability of information and communication technologies, religious authority has become dispersed through average Muslims engaging directly with digital versions of the Qur’an, Sunnah, and fatawa (the answers of religious authorities to questions posed by the community) rather than rely on the interpretations of the popularly credentialed ulama. Mandaville (2001) states that increasing literacy and printed versions of the Qur’an have removed it from oral tradition and drawn it into “debate within the public sphere” and, as a result, “the fragmentation of traditional sources of authority is...a key theme with regard to the nexus of Islam and new media” (p. 177). Mandaville (2001) claims that Muslims with a basic knowledge of Islamic methodology can use hyperlinks on databases related to the Qur’an and Sunnah to digitally replace the functions that have historically been monopolized by the alim (plural form of ulama). Says Mandaville (2003), “For many young Muslims today, a legitimate promulgator of *ijtihad* is anyone who speaks to a particular question or cause with morality, perspicacity and insight” (as cited in Kort, 2005, p. 369). Thus, as Robinson (1993) claims, any “Ahmad, Mahmud, or Muhammad” could provide an alternative to the interpretations of the local ulama (Mandaville, 2001, p. 177). Kort (2005) recasts this statement, suggesting that the internet may also pave the way for every “Aisha, Fatima, and Khadija” (p. 368) to engage in Qur’anic hermeneutics. The internet not only facilitates Muslims’ ability to develop

²⁶⁴ Scholars typically date the closure to the 4th (10th century CE) or the 7th (13th) of hijra (Hallaq, 1984).

their own exegeses but also provides platforms to disseminate these alternative interpretations toward fostering debate.

Duderija (2007), following Safi (2005), discusses a group similar to “liberal Muslims,” “Progressive Muslims,” that strives “to realize a just and pluralistic society through critically engaging Islam, a relentless pursuit of social justice, an emphasis on gender equality as a foundation of human rights, a vision of religious and ethnic pluralism, and a methodology of non-violent resistance” (p. 353-354). He also locates some of the leading proponents of the Progressive Muslims movement in the West, although he states that they can be found throughout the Muslim world as well. One of Duderija’s (2007) most salient points in regard to this discussion is that rather than the term “Progressive Muslim” being an identity, it is “a heuristic device which...[helps] delineate and describe a particular way of ‘being a Muslim’” (p. 355), which I would argue is true of many of the labels applied and/or self-ascribed to Muslims. As stated previously, one of the principle differences among Muslims is related to their preferences in relation to the consumptions of religious knowledge. For example, “Progressive Muslims” believe that interpretations of the Qur’an and Sunnah “are subject to humanly constructed interpretational processes and that a distinction between ‘religion and religious knowledge’...ought to be made” (Duderija, 2007, p. 356). Thus “Progressive Muslims” are particularly likely to engage in their own hermeneutics. On the other hand, Muslims who lean toward the consumption of traditional religious knowledge may not believe that they are qualified to engage directly with the Qur’an or to question the traditional authorities who transmit religious knowledge. Moosa (2005) claims that concepts like “Progressive Muslim” are not simply identities, but involve “identity, texts,

practices and history” and the additional element of belonging (as cited in Duderija, 2007, p. 356). Following from this statement, I am not arguing that identity does not play a role in how Muslims articulate distinctions within and between Muslim communities, but inter-community policing based on practices and consumption of religion knowledge also contribute to splintering within immediate communities, which is often overlooked in identity/typology-based and geographically focused analyses.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how various networks of practice may not only exhibit differing tendencies toward personal religiosity and the solidarity of the ummah but they frustrate typologies that are endogenously and exogenously imposed on Muslims with differing beliefs. These networks also demonstrate diversity that might be overlooked in studies based on geography and identity. Some of the Muslims discussed here do not easily fit into one or another typology but they are more or less united through their approaches to practices and religious knowledge. Certain Muslims may not have much of a choice as to which typology they are lumped into; if progressive Muslim organizations in the United States, like Muslims for Progressive Values that was referenced in the dataset related to Muslim lesbians, are the only groups that accept people who self-ascribe as “queer Muslims,” it is likely the only category in which queer Muslims will feel that they belong (Moosa, 2005). Similarly, hijabi fashion bloggers tend to flock together because they may be lumped into the traditional camp by unveiled women and into the Westernized, liberal camp by others who veil but not in a “fashionable” way. These impasses related to belonging are not likely to resolve themselves anytime soon but there is perhaps comfort in knowing that almost everyone can find someone else who

agrees with their practices and approaches to religious knowledge on the internet. The internet has also revived an important element of the accumulation of religious knowledge that has been undermined for centuries—debate—especially due to it facilitation of popular engagement with digitized forms of Islamic scriptures.

The next chapter will offer case studies related to the difficulty in locating the ummah in relation to women’s rights issues. The case study on hijab discrimination demonstrates that there are obstacles to inclusion that move beyond practices. In this case, socio-economics contribute to hindrances in solidarity that mirror the digital divide, which will also be discussed in relation to women’s rights activism. The case study on Pink Hijab Day will discuss how societal taboos and weak networks undermine movements when they attempt to travel to other contexts. Finally, the case study on SlutWalk Morocco (Woman Choufouch) shows how women’s movements can be delegitimized based on the perceived influences of Western feminism on the campaigns.

Chapter 6

Collective Action Case Studies

Two female, French students, one of whom was Muslim, used their bodies as sites of protest to express their opposition to the ban of the niqab in France in an effort to protect the rights of women in Muslim communities. In September 2010, they posted a video on *YouTube* of the pair walking down the streets of the 7th district of Paris in stilettos, miniskirts, and niqabs, as a means of participating in the niqab ban debate. Although the women claimed that their intentions were politically rather than religiously motivated, they received quite a bit of dissention from both conservative Muslims and extreme secularists. Several Muslim commenters on *YouTube* took issue with the name, believing that “Niqabitch,” the title that the women gave the campaign, was insinuating that women in niqab were bitches, which is often translated as “whore” in other languages. Several people thought they were boys or that they could not be Muslims, perhaps related to the assumption that Muslim women would not participate in “body protest” (Alexandre, 2006), which is typically perceived as a Westernized form of public dissent. Some of the extreme secularist opponents claimed that they should have gone to the *barbès* (areas primarily inhabited by French of North African descent) or to Iran so that they could understand the freedoms that they enjoy in secular France. A few of the comments were aggressively oppositional. The extreme reactions reinforce the idea that Western freedom of speech tends to be met with religious violence, similar to the *Jyllands-Posten* (Blaagard, 2010)²⁶⁵ and Rushdie (Malik, 2009; Asad, 1993)²⁶⁶ affairs.

²⁶⁵ In 2005, the Danish newspaper published various cartoons in which the Prophet was caricatured as a terrorist among other inflammatory content.

Despite the negative religious and secularist reactions, several commenters claimed that the protest was successful in promoting debate as people throughout the world had viewed and commented on the video. The NiqaBitch experiment demonstrates the difficulties in situating activism related to issues of concern for Muslim women, particularly in enacting a transnational “body protest” (Alexandre, 2006) around an issue as contentious as the right to wear niqab.

This chapter will stray from the structure of previous ones to present three case studies related to the difficulties in locating the “digital ummah network,” particularly in regard to online collective action among Muslim women and initiatives dedicating to promoting their rights. Chapter 3 conveys that digital self-expression is a form of activism related to expanding the localized/alternative and dominant transnational connective memories to include the voices of Muslim women that are often absent or silenced. Yet both Chapter 3 and 4 demonstrated that there are some impediments to women’s full participation in online spaces and, by extension, their ability to contribute to connective memories: the mediation of their narratives and social policing. Chapter 3 and 4 also introduced the term “subtle resistance,” which I suggested has become an art form involving the disruption of patriarchy through focusing on specific issues related to the lived experiences of Muslim women toward promoting their rights. Although the previous chapters touched on resistance, this chapter will broach specific events and movements that perhaps called for reactions within the “digital ummah network” and either did not translate into such or faced criticisms related to legitimacy. Although Chapter 5 demonstrated that Islamic practices could be a uniting force among Muslims,

²⁶⁶ In 1988, Rushdie published a novel in which he suggested that Satan tempted the Prophet during some of ` revelations.

there are also barriers to online inclusion in these networks of practice based on socioeconomic class, for example (Graham, 2011; Sassi, 2005; Couldry, 2003; Putnam, 1995; Ellis et al., 2004). Other obstacles relate to tactics and network bridging (Lim, 2012; Bennett, 2005; della Porta & Mosca, 2009) and localized taboos within communities, including those related to Westernization and modernization that are prevalent to varying degrees in many Muslim communities (Tohidi, 2002; Basu, 2000), even among communities in the West.

This chapter will discuss online reactions to three cases of online/offline activism related to the lived experiences and rights of Muslim women. The first case study is associated with workplace discrimination against hijabis in the United States. When I discovered workplace discrimination cases against two hijabis, Imane Boudlal and Hani Khan, I initially anticipated that the hijabi fashion bloggers would support the right of these women to wear the hijab in the workplace because they tend to advocate for conformity to veiling despite the hijab being an obstacle to securing jobs in Arab countries and in the West. However, the reactions of these bloggers were not overwhelmingly supportive of this right, which I suggest is related to socioeconomic boundaries of exclusion. From a theoretical standpoint, the digital divide within and between countries may hinder activism within the digital ummah network. The second case, Pink Hijab Day (PHD), a campaign to spread awareness about the hijab and breast cancer, discusses various obstacles to the transnational mediation of activism. Hend El-Buri, a Missourian high school student at the time of the campaign's inception, created PHD and attempted to globalize the movement through online activism and establishing contacts with organizations in Arab nations. Her efforts were only partially successful for

several reasons including the following: governments, rather than grassroots organizations, are taking the lead in promoting breast cancer awareness in some Arab countries; local stigmas related to cancer; the weak hub of the network; and failure to establish organizational support, which is often crucial to online/offline mediation. SlutWalk Morocco, the third case, faced criticisms due to its connections with the global SlutWalk movement that began in the West. The movement has been somewhat successful because SlutWalk Morocco organizers have contextualized the campaign to conform to Moroccan social values, although its connections to the global SlutWalk brand have contributed to its perceived linkages to Western feminism, which some commenters believe promotes sexual liberation, female chauvinism, moral disintegration, and the decline of the (patriarchal) family.

I will start by offering a brief overview of online activism of Muslim women, focusing on collective action in transnational cyberspaces and Arab regional women's activism. Although I offer examples of both social movements, principally disseminated online, and cases that encouraged and/or had the potential to promote online collective action among Muslims, I will use collective action theory rather than social movement theory to frame the activism discussed below because it is a bit broader and able to more appropriately speak to activists' uses of social media in all of the datasets. Collective action is "all activity involving two or more individuals contributing to a collective effort on the basis of mutual interests and the possibility of benefits from coordinated action" (Hemetsberger, 2006 as cited in Agarwal et al., 2011, p. 226).

Muslim Women and Online/Offline Activism

Although the internet could hardly be called a panacea for activism, it has inarguably facilitated some of the basic requirements of successful activism, including the dissemination of awareness and the recruitment of supporters at a low cost and fast speed (Boncheck, 1995 as cited in Garrett, 2006, p. 205; also see Myer, 1994). As Bimber et al. (2005) say, “As a result of emerging information technologies, communication is not necessarily as costly, difficult, time consuming, or limited by cognitive constraints of individuals as it once was” (p. 366). Furthermore, cyberspace allows for decentralized, non-corporeal collective action to emerge, despite the previously widespread presumption that collective action was impossible without the realization of formal organizational backing (Olson, 1965 as cited in Bimber et al., 2005, p. 368). Decentralized, non-corporeal activism as well as increased connectivity through the cost-effectiveness and instantaneity of the internet is clearly reflected in Mahfouz’s call to action, helping to mobilize citizenry through her *YouTube* video at the onset of the Egyptian Revolution (see Chapter 3). She was able to reach people through her connections to the April 6 Movement but these associates did not account for the million “views” of her video on *YouTube*. The potential for one’s message to go viral is a feature of social media networks that can scarcely be matched by offline sources of mediation, especially with the speed and cost-effectiveness of internet activism.

Although social media users often mingle with others based on national identities, mobilization through the internet is not limited nationality. According to Garrett (2006), netizens also collaborate due to the “perception among individuals that they are members of a larger community by virtue of the grievances they share. ICTs may be able to foster

collective identity across a dispersed population, which organizer can then mobilize in support of collective action.” (p. 205). Collective identity may explain the formation of an active new group known as “The uprising of women in the Arab world,” referenced in the HarassMap and the SlutWalk Morocco datasets, which garnered over 121,000 likes on *Facebook* between October 2011 and February 2014. The *Facebook* page features narratives from women all over the Arab world explaining why they support the uprising. Perhaps the “digital ummah network” that often actively emerges to decry Islamophobia, as it did in reaction to the *Jylland-Postens* and Rushdie affairs and more recently, in December 2011, when Lowe’s pulled its sponsorship from the television series “All-American Muslim” (Whitehouse, 2012), is expanding to include women’s rights issues as well. This appears to be the case in relation to a *Facebook* page in the hijab discrimination dataset. An Indonesian activist started a *Facebook* page, which had 588 members in November 2011, to support Bashira Muhammad Jordan, a hijabi in Georgia who faced discrimination from law enforcement due to her religious attire.²⁶⁷ A Google search of the same name did not yield any results related to the incident at the time but the over 500, mostly Indonesia, followers were speaking out for her rights from the other side of the world.

Although the internet fosters transnational activism, it is unclear if Muslim women rally around issues that speak to the localized contexts of the collective actions or if they are attempting to forge a transnational base of support for women throughout the world, as appears to be the case regarding the *Facebook* page dedicated to Bashira Muhammad Jordan. *Media Badger* published a survey of between 5,000 and 6,000 blogs

²⁶⁷ <http://www.facebook.com/groups/islam4you/>

written by Muslims in English from “Muslim societies” and the West (excluding “Asian countries”).²⁶⁸ The findings indicate, “Over 35% of the news articles in popular online publications that we looked at addressed “misconceptions” of Muslim women. The second most popular topic of coverage was the Hijab.” It also said that Muslim women “are very open to positive dialogue with non-Muslims...[and they] are 27% more likely to respond to inquiries than Muslim men and are 62% more likely to maintain a positive, open dialogue than males.” According to the study, Muslim women are using social media, “to discuss religious issues and the roles of gender specific understandings of scripture.” At first glance it may appear that the study is overrepresented by Muslim women in the West; however, studies of Arabic blogs have demonstrated consistent results regarding Arab Muslim women.

Etling and his colleagues (2009) found that Arab women in general tend to discuss local and international news and they were more inclined than their male counterparts to broach the following topics: women’s issues, “rights, status, hijab”; literature, poetry, and arts; and personal religiosity (p. 37). Furthermore, similar to Saudijean’s observation in Chapter 4 that Saudi women were flocking online, Etling et al. (2009) found that in the Egyptian blogosphere male bloggers were equally matched by female ones and the latter were much more likely than men to talk about women’s issue and express acceptance of Western cultures and values (p. 17), although I would argue that theirs is likely a reflexive acceptance (cooke, 2001). Though the level of internet penetration varies throughout the Arab region, these figures demonstrate that Arab women perceive social media as important vehicles for expressing themselves and

²⁶⁸ <http://www.mediabadger.com/2011/04/muslim-women-and-social-media-an-overview/>

promoting change. They are not only speaking out and promoting change through online storytelling and debate but also through activism, such as HarassMap and “Women2Drive,” which are cited as some of the most well known online initiatives in the region (Dubai School of Government, 2011; also see Yuce et al., 2013). However, one should not discount the importance of storytelling as well, as I demonstrated in Chapter 3. A few female bloggers in the region have had the storytelling on their blogs published into books, such as Riverbend’s counterhegemonic coverage of the occupation of Iraq (Lynch, 2007) and Ghada Abdel Aal’s “I want to Get Married!,” which was referenced in the Muslim spinster dataset (see Chapter 4). Thus, storytelling that might not be readily visible to the dominant transnational connective memory can be mediated through other avenues and become visible to many.

Based on the studies discussed above by *Media Badger* and Etling et al. (2009), it is difficult to decipher if there is a significant difference between the topics that Muslim women are discussing based on the contexts from which they are writing. If the *Media Badger* study had elaborated on what it means by “misconceptions” (in other words, stereotypes, Islamophobia, and/or misogyny) and if both studies had discussed how the hijab had been framed it might be clearer. However this may be less important than the confluence of topics discussed by Muslim women in social media regardless of context because these topics create opportunities for Muslim women from all over the world to connect with each other, debate, and form network linkages and bridges. For example, women from several different countries posted comments on the *We Love Hijab* posting detailed in Chapter 5. In less homophilic networks as well, Muslim women may not agree on practices or variations in regard to the consumption of religious knowledge but some

will come to the debate in transnational networks with attitudes of openness and tolerance, demonstrating vernacular cosmopolitan praxis. The interactions based on these topics could foster “bridging and brokering,” in the parlance of Social Network Analysis. My colleagues and I recently submitted a paper to a journal in which we framed these linkages as resources, following Resource Mobilization Theory, which analyzes the “variety of resources that must be mobilized, the linkages of social movements to other groups, the dependence of movements upon external support for success, and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, p. 1213; also see Yuce et al., under review). One of these “resources,” we argue, is bridging nodes that facilitate the brokering of information and the dissemination of collective action between related but disconnected networks (Yuce et al., under review; Burt, 2004). Returning to Mahmood’s (2001) framing of agency in Chapter 4, these network linkages could also facilitate the “slumbering embers that can spark to flame in the form of resistance when conditions permit” if they are able to reach a “critical mass” (Oliver et al., 1985, p. 523), or the accumulation of sufficient resources (bridges) and supporters for linkages to translate into action.

The next section will discuss the cases of Boudlal and Khan, two American hijabis who faced workplace discrimination. I attempt to elucidate why they did not receive the unconditional support of hijabi fashion bloggers and why these cases did not stimulate the activism of the digital ummah network, as did the murder of El-Sherbini, in which case the story was mediated into Egypt and other Arab countries through this alternative connective memory, leading to her iconography as the “Hijab Martyr” (see Chapter 3).

Workplace Discrimination and the Socioeconomics of Hijab

In Ghumman and Jackson's (2010) study of over 200 American hijabis, they found that hijabis have lower expectations of job placement, especially in relations to jobs in which they are highly visible to the public, because they are aware of the stigma attached to the hijab. They claim that stigmatized groups in general have lower expectations of job placement in situation in which they are outnumbered by the outgroup (Ghumman and Jackson, 2010), which is almost everywhere for hijabis in the United States. The invisibility of hijabis in the American workplace has been noted elsewhere by a freelance journalist and longtime resident of New York City, Amal Hegab. He comments, hijabis "don't have a need to work or they work in businesses owned by other Muslims, Arabs or Indians...or they work in jobs that don't require much contact with the public (thus not posing a 'threat')." ²⁶⁹ Have hijabis become self-disappeared or tightly insulated within Muslim communities? This is a possibility given they are aware of the stigma attached to their hijabs, being that many non-Muslim Americans find the garment offensive, disturbing, and/or threatening.

The next section will discuss American mainstream perspectives on hijabi rights in the workplace culled from comments on politically center-right and center-left news media outlets.

Hijabs in the Workplace and the Decline of the Dominant Culture

While social media highlighted many incidents of workplace discrimination against hijabis in the United States, this subsection will focus on two highly publicized cases. These cases are illustrative of American perspectives on the right of hijabis to

²⁶⁹ <http://www.indypressny.org/nycma/voices/144/editorials/editorials/>

practice their religious beliefs in workplaces that are visible to the public, creating a baseline to discuss the collusion between the perspectives of non-Muslim Americans and those of hijabi fashion bloggers in the next subsection. The comments related to Boudlal's case against Disney (Boudlal v. Disney) were culled from *L. A. Times* blog²⁷⁰ and those related to Khan's suit against Abercrombie & Fitch (Khan v. A&F) were extracted from the *Huffington Post*,²⁷¹ in an attempt to ascertain politically center-right and center-left reactions, respectively.

The Boudlal v. Disney case started in August 2010 when Boudlal came into her job at the Storyteller Café in the Grand California Hotel, a Disneyland resort, wearing her hijab. Imane Boudlal emigrated from Morocco and had been working at Disneyland for two years before the incident. She claims to have realized that she had the right to wear her hijab at her place of employment when she took her citizenship test in 2010 (previously, she had been wearing her hijab when she was not at work). She asked Disney to accommodate her so that her "costume" would comply with her religious beliefs but heard nothing back from the company for two months. It should be noted that one month later a hijabi summer intern was accommodated with a Disney-approved "costume" within a week.²⁷² At the beginning of Ramadan, Boudlal decided to wear her hijab to work and she was sent home. She contacted the local branch of CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) to file a complaint so that she would be able to exercise her right to wear her hijab in the public view at Disneyland.

²⁷⁰ <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2010/08/should-disneyland-bar-worker-from-wearing-religious-headscarf-join-the-debate-/comments/page/1/#comments>

²⁷¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/27/hani-khan-shocked-over-headscarf-firing_n_885621.html

²⁷² <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/cair-disney-agrees-to-allow-hijab-for-ill-muslim-intern-103858113.html>

In the case of *Khan v. A&F*, starting in October 2009, Khan had been working as a stockperson in a branch of Hollister Co. in San Mateo, California, when, in February 2010, a human resources representative told her that she was in violation of the A&F “Look Policy.” Unlike Boudlal, Hani Khan had worn her hijab to her interview and she had been working there for five months before a district manager visited the branch and saw her in her hijab. The next day, Khan and told that she would have to remove her hijab to continue working there.

The reactions of mainstream (white, Judeo-Christian, heterosexual) Americans to Boudlal’s suit against Disney were loaded with anti-Islamic sentiment—telling her to go home or to a place where her form of dress would be acceptable, which, as discussed in Chapter 3, is a myth, since there are implicit limitations to the employability of hijabis in North Africa as well. Many believed that Boudlal was seeking to swindle some money from the company, despite the comment of one person who commented that Boudlal was simply filing the complaint to gain the right to wear the hijab in the public eye at Disneyland. An interesting aspect of this case is that she wears a nametag that divulges her name and city of origin, “Casablanca, Morocco.” Boudlal commented in an interview with *Fox News* that she is asked about Casablanca by customers on a daily basis.²⁷³ While being Moroccan does not necessarily entail being Muslim, for customers with any knowledge of Morocco, they would know that the likelihood of her being Muslim is substantial. Thus, how much more intrusive is the hijab in a public space when the person’s attachment to Islam has already been established?

²⁷³ <http://www.myfoxla.com/dpp/news/muslim-employee-disney-banned-hijab-head-covering-20100818>

For many people who commented on *L. A. Times* website, the hijab is infinitely more intrusive than the knowledge that someone is most likely Muslim. Many people made comments like “Go Disney!” or “stay strong Disney” as if this corporation were fundamental to American ideals. Some commented that the dress code is instituted to create a “fantasyland” and the contentiousness of this religious symbol would dampen visitors’ experiences. Several women stated that a woman wearing the hijab is somehow imposing her religious beliefs on them. These women, along with other commenters, said that churches and mosques are the only appropriate spaces to express one’s religious beliefs—not in the workplace or even in public. Some interlocutors claimed that Muslims are being “cry babies” and seeking “special privileges,” which Jews and Christians are denied. However, they fail to acknowledge that many Christians and Jews do not feel that they are required by their religions to wear specific garments.

The idea that the grooming standards and costumes at Disney are neutral, lacking any hint of religious or political affiliation, perpetuates the dominance of white, middle class, heteronormative culture in the supposedly multicultural American society. For commenters seeking to remove religious symbols from the public eye, so as to not have another’s religion “forced down...[their] throats,” as well as for those who were blatantly Islamophobic and xenophobic, the underlying issue is not so much associated with secularism as it is with their perception of the decline of privilege associated with the dominant culture. This is most clearly articulated by the commenters who believed that this complaint was a stepping stone toward the eventual Muslim takeover of the American society, ultimately aimed at establishing *Shari’ah*, and by those who opined that the civil rights of (white, Judeo-Christian, heterosexual...) “Americans” are never

the focus of protectionist measures, only those of immigrants and minority ethnic and racial groups.

Although the comments on the *Huffington Post* regarding Khan's lawsuit against A&F were much less patently intolerant than those posted on the *L. A. Times*, some of the interlocutors expressed their concern that opinions on the site of late had regressed to conservative xenophobia. One poster commented, "Has the HP allowed itself to be taken over by a horde of sicko rightwing trolls??" and several people agreed this was a possibility. The slant of "progressive" Americans on the *Huffington Post*, similar to the reactions in the Boudlal case, was that private companies have the right to impose dress codes and Muslims were demanding too many special rights. Others believed, analogous to the imagined global sisterhood proposed by some white feminists, that they were saving the hopelessly oppressed Muslim woman from herself (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 789-790). Some argued that women are forced to wear the hijab through familial coercion or because they are brainwashed into thinking that it is an Islamic mandate. One white woman even commented, "[wearing hijab] is most definitely a threat to me and to every American" because she believes that Muslim women do not have a choice. She, like several other commenters, refused to recognize that the hijab could be a personal choice or that it could be anything more than a symbol of misogyny, although scholars have demonstrated that it worn for a variety of reasons (Ahmed, 2005; Robinson, *Sexuality, Difference, and American Hijabi Fashion Bloggers*, under review). Therefore, in response to the question about the "sicko rightwing trolls," this could be the case, but it is also possible that it is not so much related to the growing conservatism of the website but to the acceptability of Islamophobia across various mainstream American political

affiliations. The commenters who were more tolerant of the hijab were accused of “cultural relativism,” which was a common theme in several of the datasets, particularly in relation to veiling. For Westerners to question the link between the hijab and misogyny is akin to cultural treason.

“Get another job” or “why would she work there in the first place” were common responses, particularly regarding Khan’s case against A & F, a retailer that capitalizes on immodesty. One respondent claims that Khan applied for the job because some of her friends were already working there.²⁷⁴ Boudlal states that she accepted employment with Disney because she needed a job.²⁷⁵ Some people encouraged these women to start their own businesses—a few even thought that Boudlal could start her own theme park. These comments obviously ignore the reality of today’s economy. Of the hundreds of comments posted regarding these two cases, only a few people mentioned that these women probably took the first jobs that were offered to them. The underlying conflict between the widespread rejection of the hijab and the employability of hijabis is an important concern to which I will return promptly.

This subsection has demonstrated that mainstream Americans often perceive accommodating religious beliefs as an assault on the privilege of the dominant culture, which encourages the acceptability of Islamophobia among various political persuasions, even among the so-called “progressive” varieties. The next subsection will frame reactions to these cases on the hijabi fashion blogs, which were more or less consistent with mainstream responses.

²⁷⁴ <http://southsanfrancisco.patch.com/groups/business-news/p/woman-shocked-over-headscarf-firing>

²⁷⁵ <http://www.myfoxla.com/dpp/news/muslim-employee-disney-banned-hijab-head-covering-20100818>

Hijabi Reactions

The reactions of non-Muslim Americans to these two cases were not enormously surprising but the fact that they mirrored the responses of hijabis on the hijabi fashion blogs was startling indeed,²⁷⁶ particularly since some hijabis referred to this as one of the “stupid excuses” that women employ to justify their non-conformity with the practice of veiling. Some hijabis questioned why the women accepted employment at these companies and suggested that certain jobs were inappropriate for hijabis, particularly jobs with these corporations for the following reasons: Disney, for its controversial exhibit that framed Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, igniting protests and proposed boycotts by American Muslim groups in 1999²⁷⁷; and Abercrombie & Fitch, for capitalizing on hypersexualized advertisements and the overall lack of modesty of its clothing line. Others disagreed that there are jobs that should be off limits to hijabis, other than Playboy and Hooters. For instance, Miriam Sobh, the creator *Hijabtrendz*, is sympathetic to why a hijabi may have applied at A & F because Sobh had likewise accepted employment at Victoria’s Secret because she needed a job.²⁷⁸

Similar to the mainstream non-Muslim commenters, some of the hijabi interlocutors believed that companies have the right to impose a standard of dress on their employees and to present a certain “image” or “look.” In the case of Boudlal v. Disney,

²⁷⁶ <http://www.hijabtrendz.com/2010/08/24/disney-hijab-controversy/>

<http://www.hijabtrendz.com/2009/09/22/why-is-hijab-always-such-a-big-deal/>

²⁷⁷ <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Muslims+and+Arabs+to+Boycott+Disney.-a055806494>

http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/israel/disney_boycott_seen_economic_warfare

<http://www.jta.org/1999/10/04/life-religion/features/disney-world-exhibit-links-jerusalem-to-israel-without-a-mention-of-capital-3>

<http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/11749/disney-response-on-jerusalem-exhibit-calms-arabs/>

²⁷⁸ It should be noted the Sobh’s comments were linked to another case of discrimination against a hijabi by A & F, in which the EEOC found the company at fault: <http://www.hijabtrendz.com/2009/09/22/why-is-hijab-always-such-a-big-deal/#more-5615>, <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/muslim-teen-denied-abcrombie-job-hijab/story?id=8608173>. Samantha Elauf was told by the interviewers at a branch of Abercrombie kids in Missouri that her hijab did not comply with the company’s “Look Policy.”

many of the hijabis believed that Disney had offered a reasonable compromise (either the alternative “costume” or the “backstage” job) and implied that Boudlal was being “inflexible.” The hijabis largely ignored two commenters who mentioned that Disney offered an alternative only after Boudlal had filed the complaint. Furthermore, Disney played the “backstage” card when it moved hijab-wearing Aicha Baha to another position in 2004. She ended up with such a substantial pay decrease that she was forced to quit.²⁷⁹ Similarly, if Boudlal had agreed to move to a telephone-based job with the same salary, she would have likely faced a substantial pay decrease through her loss of gratuities, which, as anyone who has worked in the hospitality sector knows, is a substantial portion of the employee’s income. Comparable to mainstream discussions, some of the comments on the hijabi fashion blogs failed to recognize the distinction between violating a dress code (wearing a tank top) and violating it to uphold a religious conviction, which I will return to promptly. The commenters on the hijabi fashion blogs were also concerned about how lawsuits and complaints would reflect on hijabis and Muslims in general, which they opined could result in extreme secularist and Islamophobic backlashes, and many believed that the hijabis should have simply looked for other jobs without filing the complaints.

The subsection above demonstrated some consistency between mainstream American and hijabi reactions to the issue of hijabi rights in the workplace. The next will attempt to elucidate why American Muslim communities, including the hijabi fashion bloggers, have not promoted hijabi workplace rights through collective action while they have collectivized around other issues.

²⁷⁹ http://www.hotel-online.com/News/PR2004_2nd/May04_DisneyCode.html

Obstacles to Collective Action in Support of Workplace Rights for Hijabis

One of the greatest obstacles to hijabis demanding their workplace rights is the general lack of understanding of the protections guaranteed by the Civil Rights Act regarding the reasonable accommodation of religious beliefs. The most pertinent aspect of reasonable accommodation related to the incidents above is that “Employers [with more than 15 employees] must reasonably accommodate employees’ sincerely held religious practices unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employer.”²⁸⁰ The website denotes “undue hardship” as typically limited to “safety concerns” in relation to religious apparel and that the preferences of the company’s clientele for company representatives who do not wear religious garments cannot be considered an “undue hardship.” The mainstream and hijabi perspective that companies should have the right to enforce a dress code begs the question of, if all companies should be able to enforce a dress code, what would happen if all companies decided that employees could not wear anything on their heads? This freedom of private entities to impose certain “image” standards would make certain populations structurally unemployable. Only one person, not a hijabi, suggested this possibility out of the hundreds of comments that were posted in response to these cases. Denying reasonable accommodation to uphold a company’s image is clearly not what the Civil Rights Act had in mind.

Another obstacle may be the lack of consensus within Muslim communities regarding the hijab mandate. As noted previously, Muslims have come together in protests against Islamophobia and Zionism, notably, in 1999, when Muslims proposed boycotts of Disney and, in 2011, when Muslims boycotted Lowe’s. However, solidarity

²⁸⁰ http://www.adl.org/religious_freedom/resource_kit/religion_workplace.asp

in relation to hijabi rights appears constrained. Similar collective actions were not proposed following Disney's *de facto* termination of Baha in 2004 or after Boudlal's suspension in 2010. Similarly, A&F has been involved in several lawsuits for denying employment to women who wear the hijab but there is little evidence of organized Muslim boycotts of this retailer. Collective action surrounding a woman's right to wear the hijab in the workplace is perhaps hampered because there is not universal agreement within Muslim communities regarding the veiling mandate (see Chapter 5). For example, some scholars argue that the imperative of modesty should be culturally contextualized rather than instituting the standards of dress that were recommended for Muslim women during the time of the Prophet (Barlas, 2002; Wadud, 1999; Barazangi, 2004). The contentiousness of this issue is also highlighted by the comments on the *We Love Hijab* posting in Chapter 5, particularly by the criticisms that women face from their Muslim families and immediate communities.

A third obstacle, which I will explore in further detail in the next subsection, is related to what I call the "socioeconomics of hijab." In a nationwide survey of Muslim Americans undertaken by the Pew Research Center, the findings indicated that the majority of Muslims in the United States are "middle class and mostly mainstream."²⁸¹ While it cannot be said that all or even most of the commenters on the hijabi fashion blogs come from middle or upper middle class backgrounds, the creators of these sites appear to emanate from these socioeconomic groups. As such, they are undoubtedly more concerned with general reactions to Muslims than they are with the anxiety that the manager at McDonalds will discriminate against them for wearing a hijab to an

²⁸¹http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/pew_report_highlights_muslim_american_attitudes

interview,²⁸² which has, in fact, happened on several occasions in the greater Detroit area, despite the local McDonalds featuring halal chicken nuggets to appeal to the Muslim clientele.²⁸³ Due to the higher socioeconomic statuses of the creators of hijabi fashion blogs, the bloggers and commenters may lack sympathy for working-class hijabis who face discrimination in the labor market because the former, some of whom are stay-at-home mothers or self-employed, are not likely to be subjected to it.

This subsection has discussed possible obstacles to collective action among Muslims communities in opposition to workplace discrimination against hijabis, including the following: lack of understanding regarding corporate responsibilities in relation to reasonable accommodation, lack of agreement on the veiling mandate within the Muslim communities, and lack of empathy among hijabis for women of lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The next subsection will discuss the last obstacle in more detail, positioning the issue theoretically as an aspect of the digital divide.

Discussion: Socioeconomics of Hijab

Graham broaches the complexity and textures of digital spaces, arguing that one must recognize the “economic, cultural, political and technological” aspects of each person accessing these spaces (Graham, 2011, p. 212 as cited in Robinson and Parmentier, forthcoming), which vary within communities based on factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic class. Couldry (2003) articulates a similar claim that community and societal differences offline will manifest online as well (also see Couldry, 2012). In the same vein, Robinson and Parmentier (forthcoming) found that the online collective action

²⁸² <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2008/jul/25/mcdonalds.usa>
<http://www.nkmlawyers.com/legalbites/index.php/2010/04/muslim-woman-denied-job-at-detroit-mcdonalds-files-complaint/>

²⁸³ <http://www.dailystrength.org/groups/womensissues/discussions/messages/4212266>

frames advanced by upper and upper middle class Moroccan bloggers during the protests in 2011 did not resonate with majority of Moroccans, who principally emanate from the lower class. This is not strictly a norm of less developed nations though, as Sparks (2000) demonstrates in his discussion of information-rich and information-poor groups within the United States (as cited in Sassi, 2005, p. 689; also see Hüsing & Selhofer, 2002). Consequently, although scholars have often focused on digital divides between countries, similar divides are also reflected in the various positionalities of people within the same societies and communities. As a result, socioeconomic rifts could have adverse effects on the likelihood of communities collectivizing around common objectives.

In the present case, one of the objectives of the network of practice related to hijabi fashion is to detangle the hijab from its association with oppression and resituate it as a symbol of pride for one's membership in Muslim communities and the larger ummah (see Chapter 5). Nevertheless, being that American hijabis are also part of the American society, they also appear to be attempting to normalize the American hijabi identity, which is supported by findings of the Williams and Vashi (2007) study. To accomplish these perhaps contradictory aims, they interact with other hijabis online and they share narratives about why they wear the hijab through their blogs; the latter action is most likely targeted toward others who do not already understand why Muslim women wear the hijab rather than other hijabis. Putnam (1995) describes this as building online social capital: "Social capital is...exercised through bridging, or exclusive, networks, connecting people who are different, via, for example, collective action and the creation of broader collective identity" (as cited in Ellis et al., 2004, p. 168). In other words,

American hijabis believe that, if they normalize the hijabi identity, belonging in the American societies can be broadened toward their inclusion.

Hijabis fashion bloggers may believe that the high notoriety of and negative mainstream reactions to these cases involving hijabis, Boudlal v. Disney and Khan v. A&F, undermine their attempts to normalize the American hijabi identity. Ellis et al. (2004) say, “A central assumption is that social networks have value proportional to the extent to which they encourage mutually beneficial behavior, information sharing, and cooperation” (p. 168). It is the last part, especially toward “encourag[ing] mutually beneficial behavior,” in which Boudlal and Khan went astray. Moreover, Komito’s (2001) assertion that online social networks interact “without reference to the diversity of the contemporary community” (as cited in Ellis et al., 2004, p. 169) is the dynamic in which the hijabi fashion bloggers went astray. If Boudlal and Khan had been privy to conversations on these blogs, they might have realized that other hijabis would have encouraged them to leave their jobs quietly so that they did not encourage negative perceptions, related to the supposed intransigence of Muslim communities, of hijabis and other Muslims within mainstream America. They may have realized for the mutual benefit of other hijabis that filing complaints with CAIR and the high notoriety of the cases would encourage backlash against other hijabis. They may have also realized that certain venues were not considered appropriate places for hijabis to seek employment. However, the comfortable class status of the hijabi fashion bloggers discourages them from acknowledging the realities of the job market. Boudlal had no overwhelming to desire to work for Disney but she needed a job. The bloggers’ intolerance for the “stupid excuses” that unveiled women make for not veiling should also translate into the

unconditional support of hijabi fashion blogger for the plights of hijabis, especially “excuses” related to their livelihood but this was not the case. Some of the hijabi fashion bloggers, notably Sobh,²⁸⁴ have featured news items related to hijab discrimination around the world so this is an issue that hijabi fashion bloggers collectivize around but certain cases closer to home do not encourage their solidarity, particularly cases which are perceived to undermine the normalization of Muslim communities in the American society for perhaps what are regarded as individualistic motivations—a paycheck.

This case study has demonstrated the difficulties in uniting Muslims within the same society toward collective action in support of hijabi rights in the workplace, demonstrated by the lack of support among more affluent hijabis whose reactions to cases of discrimination against hijabis mirrored those of non-Muslim Americans. Collective action within the digital ummah network appears to mobilize around cases related to Islamophobia and Zionism but, since the veiling mandate remains contested within Muslim communities, mobilization around the rights of hijabis remains spotty. This is not to say that another node of the transnational hijabi fashion network did not pick up and mediate the cases of Boudlal v. Disney and Khan v. A&F, which lends to the possibility of extensions to network bridges and the potential for future collective action related to this issue, possibly stemming from outside of the United States.

Due to the noted obstacles within societies, transnational forms of collective action are even more complicated. The next case study will demonstrate to the difficulties in mediating an initiative, Pink Hijab Day, among Muslims transnationally.

²⁸⁴ <http://www.hijabtrendz.com/2011/06/23/hijab-news-round-up-june-2011/>

Pink Hijab Day (PHD)

Pink Hijab Day is a campaign that started in the United States in 2004 to spread awareness about breast cancer and the hijab. The event went national in 2007 when the founder of PHD, Hend El-Buri, partnered with the Susan G. Koman Foundation²⁸⁵ and it went global in 2008 through *Facebook*.²⁸⁶ An article in the *Missourian* states that the movement was disseminated into ten countries, including Botswana, Canada, Egypt, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Trinidad, the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates. At first glance, PHD appeared to have some following in Arab nations, at least in the UAE, Egypt, and Qatar; however, it quickly became apparent that most of the MENA organizations that were linked to PHD in American social and conventional media were not currently participating in the event.

I contacted a representative of the American PHD campaign through email to ascertain more information about why the organizations in the Arab region that were linked to PHD had stopped participating. Her response was that some of the organizations, without mentioning names, that the campaign linked to on the original PHD website were not partners of the movement but organizations that the campaign had listed to facilitate the ease of making contributions to local breast cancer initiatives. The American PHD representative told me that the movement encourages “people in each community to find their own resources, create their own events, and donate to the cancer organizations that they choose.”²⁸⁷ This open stance on participation speaks to PHD’s transnational appeal. However, the representative also remarked that the MENA region organizations in

²⁸⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Pink-Hijab-Day/159442831321?sk=info>

²⁸⁶ <http://www.columbiamissourian.com/stories/2009/10/29/pink-hijabs-promote-breast-cancer-awareness-break-stereotypes/>

²⁸⁷ Anonymized, email message to author, March 28, 2012.

question, with the exception of Think Pink Qatar (TPQ), stopped participating in PHD either because they failed to maintain contact with the American campaign or because it failed to follow up with them. This failure to maintain relations, despite PHD's lax views on participation, could speak to the lack of consistency between the goals of the American PHD campaign and those of the MENA organizations or to societal constraints that might qualify participation in the region. This difficulty in establishing local organizational support also was articulated elsewhere in social media coverage of the campaign. El-Buri says in an interview with Sobh, "I'm trying to get national representatives...so we can be more efficient and plan together. It was challenging in some places (particularly in Muslim countries) where there was no breast cancer research foundation to refer people to when they wanted to donate."²⁸⁸ However, I found little evidence to suggest that some of the organizations had ever participated, which I will expand upon in this section's "Discussion."

Framing the American PHD Movement

In 2003, El-Buri noticed that she and some of her friends had coincidentally worn pink hijabs on the same day²⁸⁹ and she had an epiphany of expanding this coincidence into a movement so she contacted the Susan G. Komen Foundation and established PHD as a national event in 2007. In 2008, El-Buri created a *Facebook* page, which enabled the campaign to spread to other countries,²⁹⁰ attracting 7,000 people in the first year.²⁹¹ The

²⁸⁸ <http://www.hijabtrendz.com/2008/10/20/pink-hijab-day/>

²⁸⁹ <http://www.hijabtrendz.com/2008/10/20/pink-hijab-day/>

²⁹⁰ <http://www.columbiamissourian.com/stories/2009/10/29/pink-hijabs-promote-breast-cancer-awareness-break-stereotypes/>

²⁹¹ <http://www.facebook.com/events/9267327804/>

[\[komen.org/site/TR/PassionatelyPink/HeadquartersSite?px=1866812&pg=personal&fr_id=2263\]\(http://www.info-komen.org/site/TR/PassionatelyPink/HeadquartersSite?px=1866812&pg=personal&fr_id=2263\)](http://www.info-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

<http://muslamics.blogspot.com/2007/10/october-26-national-pink-hijab-day.html>

last Wednesday of October was designated as the ongoing date of the event.²⁹² In the initial years of the event, the stated mission, based on the now defunct www.pinkhijabday.net website,²⁹³ was to “shatter stereotypes of Muslim women as well as raise awareness and funds for breast cancer research. All over the world, Muslims participated by wearing pink hijabs, pink ribbons, and donating to breast cancer foundations.” The new website, www.pinkhijabday.org, which came online in 2011, had shifted its purpose the following:

to encourage those who are curious about Muslim women and about hijab to ask Muslim women about what their hijab means...to encourage Muslim women to participate in various community improvement projects [including breast cancer] because we are a valuable part of the fabric of the societies we live in.²⁹⁴

This is a subtle but important shift that relocalizes a global initiative to specific contexts. “Shattering stereotypes” could have applied to Muslim women all over the world, as the *Media Badger* study suggests (also see Chapter 4 related to stereotypes), but the revised objective, to encourage “those who are curious about Muslim women and about hijab to ask Muslim women about what their hijab means,” is not likely to be an important issue in Muslim-majority societies.

The new website does include content that is perhaps relevant to Muslims everywhere. One of the “Talking Points” states that people should think of their bodies as “a trust from Allah (swt)...[and] improving one’s health IS something that Allah (swt) will reward us for.”²⁹⁵ Another speaks to the empowerment of women by stating, “During the time of the Prophet (pbuh), he used to praise the women of Medina for not shying

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Pink-Hijab-Day/159442831321?sk=info>

²⁹² <http://www.hijabtrendz.com/2008/10/20/pink-hijab-day/>.

²⁹³ <http://welovehijab.com/2009/10/07/global-pink-hijab-day/>

²⁹⁴ <http://pinkhijabday.org/>

²⁹⁵ <http://pinkhijabday.org/talking-points/>

away from asking questions in order to learn and better themselves.” However, despite the appeal to Muslims everywhere, in 2011, not even Qatar, the organization that the American representative claimed to be the most faithful affiliate in the region in our email exchange, is listed among the countries sponsoring events on the new PHD website. The Arab world is noticeably absent, particularly because it is often cited in articles and posting about PHD perhaps to reinforce the universal importance of breast cancer awareness and substantiate the transnationalism of the PHD movement. Most of the events included on the website were based in the United States, but there are also events listed for Canada, South Africa, and Bulgaria. PHD may have also cut ties with the Komen initiative—there was nothing posted on its website about PHD since 2009—while organizations from Egypt, the KSA, and the UAE have partnered with the Susan G. Komen Global Initiative (SGKGI) as recently as 2011, 2009, and 2009, respectively. Since there were few connections between the American PHD campaign and breast cancer awareness campaigns in the Arab region, I decided to analyze the MENA organizations that were initially linked to PHD on the old website in an attempt to elucidate why the campaign did not take root in the region.

This subsection framed how PHD may have initially appealed to Muslim women throughout the world but, upon shifting its focus, the stated aims became more consistent with Muslim women living Muslim-minority societies. The next subsection will discuss the sparse evident of Egypt’s past involvement with PHD and how the Breast Cancer Foundation of Egypt (BCFE) has promoted Egyptian-style breast cancer awareness.

Egypt

Through personal emails with a representative of the Breast Cancer Foundation of Egypt (BCFE), I discovered that it has not been involved in the PHD initiative since 2008.²⁹⁶ The only record of its participation in PHD on the BCFE website encouraged women to wear pink hijabs on Monday, October 27, 2008.²⁹⁷ There is little evidence that PHD is or was disseminated through social media. One woman asked about the Egyptian event on the PHD *Facebook* page in September and October of 2010 but did not receive a reply,²⁹⁸ which suggests the inconsistency of American PHD coordinators in disseminating information about the movement online. Nonetheless, the BCFE is actively supporting breast cancer awareness and raising funds toward a cure in a distinctly Egyptian fashion.

One such example of local flair from the BCFE website highlights the popularity of Egyptian cinematography in disseminating social messages. A docudrama on the website outlines Aida's predicament of choosing between conforming to societal norms or following her intuition to get screened for breast cancer after her sister dies of the disease. In one scene, Aida's hijabi co-worker rejects the idea that women should get screened because she believes that health and disease are in Allah's hands. This co-worker avers that her ancestors were not screened for cancer and they were better people than her. Despite her co-worker's reaction, Aida eventually gets examined for breast cancer to find that she does have a lump in her breast. Before her surgery, Aida cries out

²⁹⁶ Anonymized, email message to author, December 5, 2011.

²⁹⁷ <http://www.bcfе.org/en/SubPage.asp?PID=91&ParID=3>.

²⁹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Pink-Hijab-Day/159442831321>

in her despair that she “won’t be a woman anymore” if she loses her breast and hair.

Ultimately, Aida is able to save her breasts through early detection.²⁹⁹

In another video mainly in English with subtitles for Mrs. Manal’s narrative in Arabic, Mrs. Manal highlights religion as a source of strength for women battling the cancer.³⁰⁰ She states that she read the Qur’an twice in the twenty-day period between her diagnosis and surgery. The two videos may be unwittingly connecting the health outcomes of Aida and Mrs. Manal with their worldviews and personas. Aida, in her late forties/early fifties, is working outside of the home, free of conspicuous religious affiliation, and she prevails through her health issues relatively unscathed. Mrs. Manal, on the other hand, seems to be in her sixties and is diagnosed in the latter stages of disease. Her religious proclivities, wearing the hijab and citing the Qur’an as a source of comfort, are much more obvious than Aida’s. The repercussions of breast cancer in her case are also much more severe—a double mastectomy. Do these outcomes implicitly link the benefits of modern medicine and survival to the “modern” Egyptian woman and link tradition to morbidity?

BCFE’s partnership with SGKGI has given rise to the “Race for the Cure” that has attracted 10,000 people annually since its onset in 2009,³⁰¹ which demonstrates that it is not opposed to affiliations with transnational campaigns. BCFE had a solid support base before it partnered with SGKGI though. The BCFE-sponsored “Run for the Cure” drew 300 participants in 2004,³⁰² including various celebrity personalities, and

²⁹⁹ <http://www.bcfе.org/en/multimedia.asp?vidid=14#vid>

³⁰⁰ <http://www.bcfе.org/en/multimedia.asp?vidid=2#vid>

³⁰¹ <http://globalkomen.org/where-we-work/egypt/race-for-the-cure/>

³⁰² <http://www.bcfе.org/en/article.asp?pg=1&SecID=24&NewsID=167>

participation doubled the following year³⁰³ and nearly tripled in 2006.³⁰⁴ The “Run” was replaced by the “Race” in 2009. But why was PHD less successful? There are few constraints to Egyptian women wearing hijabs in various colors and BCFE had already established a substantial support base by 2008, the year that PHD went global, so why did it discontinue its involvement after that first year? One can only speculate given the cryptic email responses from the American PHD representative and BCFE one.

The next section will discuss Qatar, which also had a thriving campaign at the onset of the American PHD campaign.

Qatar

A representative of Think Pink Qatar (TPQ) stated through email that TPQ has annually participated in PHD since 2009.³⁰⁵ Karen Al kharouf, the founder of TPQ, the preeminent breast cancer organization in Qatar, which is tied to the National Qatar Cancer Society (NQCS), has been organizing local events since 2007.³⁰⁶ An email from a TPQ representative stated, “We encourage and set aside a day when all the women in Qatar who cover to wear...a Pink Headcovering. Many ladies throughout Qatar regardless of their religious backgrounds participate...to rally as a united support system.” Qatari events typically take place on Saturdays in October³⁰⁷ and the pink hijab is one among many manifestations of solidarity with the promotion of breast cancer awareness:

³⁰³ <http://www.bcfе.org/en/article.asp?pg=1&SecID=24&NewsID=168>.

³⁰⁴ <http://www.bcfе.org/en/article.asp?pg=1&SecID=24&NewsID=170>.

³⁰⁵ Anonymized, email message to author, December 4, 2011.

³⁰⁶ <http://www.timeoutdoha.com/community/features/18257-breast-cancer-month>

³⁰⁷ <http://www.qatarshub.com/english/newsfeeds.aspx?nfid=248&pn=5>.

Pink-Out Day in schools, Think Pink Benefit Gala, Harley Davidson Women's Ride for Life, and so forth.³⁰⁸

An important element of the Qatari campaign is destigmatizing the disease for younger generations so that they could influence awareness among older generations, which is emphasized by "Pink-Out Day" events sponsored in schools. Al kharouf states, "Qatar [has]...a massive awareness campaign in universities and schools. This will make the daughters talk to the mothers about the symptoms and the need of early diagnoses."³⁰⁹ Unlike the other countries discussed here, Qatar was not listed as one of the countries that has partnered with the SGKGI perhaps, due to the already "massive" momentum surrounding breast cancer awareness in Qatar, transnational partnerships were superfluous.

Despite Qatar's proactive stance on breast cancer awareness, some media on the Qatar National Cancer Society website advance a subtle connection between the modern West and the prospects of remission and tradition and morbidity, similar to the Egyptian examples of Aida and Mrs. Manal. An *Al Jazeera* report links "traditional societies"³¹⁰ of the MENA region to the failure of women to participate in early detection. This traditional mentality prevents Noor, a woman in her late 30s, who is diagnosed with stage one breast cancer, from seeking support among her friend through divulging her condition to them at the insistence of her family. This mentality, according to the report, results in 64% of the cases being diagnosed in the latter stages of the disease. The video

³⁰⁸ <http://www.qatarliving.com/node/648148>

³⁰⁹ <http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar/131111-arab-women-at-risk-of-breast-cancer-studies.html>
<http://m.gulfnews.com/in-focus/breast-cancer/delay-in-breast-cancer-treatment-putting-arab-women-at-risk-1.704906>

³¹⁰ <http://www.qncs.org/cms/resources.html>

concludes with the reporter's remarks, "With an increasingly young and educated population and integration with Western lifestyle, it's hope that such steps will break down old barriers and save lives for future generations." The report connects the movement away from traditional (read: non-Western) values with hope. Al kharouf offers a more textured response than this modern/traditional dichotomy. She states, "Even the US took 20 years to bring awareness about breast cancer."³¹¹ In other words, stigma related to breast cancer is not an element of the East-West divide, but a topic that becomes less disconcerting with increased exposure and dialogue. In the same vein, a doctor in Qatar claims, "education and encouragement...were often integrated with traditional and religious beliefs and worked together to promote breast cancer screening,"³¹² which challenges the idea that modern/traditional are mutually exclusive categories. Emphasizing the modern/traditional binary, on one hand, and situating early detection in religious beliefs, illustrated by Ms. Manal's narrative, on the other, appear to be common trends in Egypt and Qatar.

The next section will discuss breast cancer awareness in Saudi Arabia but not PHD because it never arrived.

Saudi Arabia

A representative of Zahra, the leading breast cancer awareness initiative in Saudi Arabia, forwarded me information regarding its sponsored initiatives—PHD was not one of them.³¹³ She sent the documentary, "A Woman's Stand," and information about an art exhibit at the Saudi Embassy in Washington, D.C. in November 2011. "A Woman's

³¹¹ <http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar/131111-arab-women-at-risk-of-breast-cancer-studies.html>

³¹² <http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar/131111-arab-women-at-risk-of-breast-cancer-studies.html>

³¹³ Anonymized, email message to author, December 11, 2011.

Stand” was a campaign to form the largest recorded “Human Awareness Ribbon” comprised of 3,952 Saudi women in Jeddah.³¹⁴ Saudi women were furnished with scarves to make the ribbon pink perhaps because pink hijabs are not garments that Saudi women are likely to own. The art exhibition was a display of photographs associated with the first anniversary of this record-breaking human formation. According to the Saudi embassy website, Zahra has been sponsoring breast cancer awareness since October of 2003.³¹⁵ The royal family and, by extension, the government has played an active role in these initiatives, including Princess Reema’s sponsorship of “A Woman’s Stand”³¹⁶ and Princess Haifa Al-Faisal's service as a chairperson for the Zahra board of directors.³¹⁷ Dr. Al-Amoudi, discussed below, has also honored King Abdullah as the “ultimate feminist”³¹⁸ for his dedication to improving women’s rights.

Apart from the Zahra initiative, Dr. Samia Al-Amoudi has been a leading advocate of breast cancer awareness in the KSA since 2006, which has contributed to her recognition as the 5th (among 100) most influential women in the Middle East.³¹⁹ Her efforts culminated into the formation of a breast cancer center.³²⁰ Dr. Al-Amoudi had been screening women for breast cancer daily when she was diagnosed with late stage breast cancer. Just ten days after her diagnosis, she spoke to a group about her failure to get a mammogram. Part of Dr. Al-Amoudi’s influence stems from her willingness to share her personal experiences toward shattering taboos about the disease. Taboos

³¹⁴ <http://www.fainak.com/portal/Maria/blog/thousands-of-females-stand-shoulder-to-shoulder-in-jeddah-forming-the-large-3/>

³¹⁵ http://www.saudiembassy.net/latest_news/news11181103.aspx

³¹⁶ <http://www.fainak.com/portal/Maria/blog/thousands-of-females-stand-shoulder-to-shoulder-in-jeddah-forming-the-large-3/>

³¹⁷ <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=20110929109662>

³¹⁸ http://alamoudi-breastcenter.kau.edu.sa/Default.aspx?Site_ID=905&lng=EN

³¹⁹ <http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/currentissues/health/>

³²⁰ <http://globalkomen.org/where-we-work/saudi-arabia/>

associated with cancer in general have dissuaded many people from participating in screening and seeking treatment, which has resulted in 70% of all breast cancer cases being diagnosed in the latter stages of the disease.³²¹ Saudis, like other Arabs, will not mention the disease by name and many families worry that a mother's diagnosis will ruin her daughter's chances of getting married.³²² Thus, similar to Noor from Qatar, among Saudi women there is a social imperative to hide the disease.

An additional concern for Saudi women is the possibility of being seen by male doctors; thus the gender of the medical practitioner is often the first question that women ask Al-Amoudi about the screening.³²³ Although Al-Amoudi recounted that a man removed his wife from the exam room because the technicians were male, this same article discussed Saudi men who were supportive of their wives' health issues, like a husband who shaved his head when his wife started losing her hair due to chemotherapy treatments.³²⁴ This article also cites another Saudi woman whose family supported her but who stated that she was disappointed by the reactions of women within her community, who acted as if she were already on her deathbed and told her to forgo chemotherapy in favor of herbs.

In the Saudi context, it appears that the government has taken the lead in countering social taboos and promoting breast cancer awareness. While social media users expressed their support of the government's campaigns,³²⁵ some women did not

³²¹ <http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/currentissues/health/>

³²² http://www.blz.com/news/2007/10/24/Laura_Bush_meets_breast_cancer_4541.html

³²³ http://www.blz.com/news/2007/10/24/Laura_Bush_meets_breast_cancer_4541.html

³²⁴ http://www.blz.com/news/2007/10/24/Laura_Bush_meets_breast_cancer_4541.html

³²⁵ <http://americanbedu.com/2010/10/27/saudi-arabia-you-can-help-make-history-in-jeddah-show-support-for-breast-cancer-awareness/>

think PHD would be possible in the Saudi context³²⁶; since cancer is entrenched in taboos, wearing a pink hijab would be akin to holding a sign that reads, “I have cancer.”

Furthermore, the strict standards of dress imposed by law would make it difficult to wear a pink hijab and perhaps the hijab would be an unlikely symbol for Saudi women to collectivize behind because they are required to wear it, similar to the rejection of the women-only spa due to legally imposed gender segregation (Chapter 4).

The next section will principally discuss a video that was produced through a partnership between the SGKGI and Simply Check, the leading breast cancer awareness organization in the UAE, and another video featuring Emirati celebrities. There was no official recognition of PHD by Emirati breast cancer organizations but observance of it has been noted among Emirati women, so perhaps it has spread organically through transnational network bridging.

United Arab Emirates

The UAE, like Egypt, Qatar, and the KSA, has been participating in breast cancer awareness events since at least 2007. In that year, Dubai Healthcare City made a 29-meter ribbon out of 105,000 pink carnations, which was entered into the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest ribbon ever recorded.³²⁷ Although the UAE sponsors a multitude of events, including the Pink Caravan Pink Bus, and a female-operated, mobile screening service, a representative Simply Check, a subsidiary of the Health Authority of Abu Dhabi (HAAD), claims that these government-sponsored organizations do not participate in PHD.³²⁸ Though there did not appear to be any official backing of PHD,

³²⁶ <http://archive.arabnews.com/?page=1§ion=0&article=103147&d=3&m=11&y=2007>

³²⁷ http://www.beautybeyondbreast.com/breast_cancer_abu_dhabi_dubai_uae.html#nov16

³²⁸ Anonymized, email message to author, December 7, 2011.

there were articles that cited popular participation perhaps as organic manifestations of solidarity. The “Bedouin Princess,” an Emirati blogger, dedicated a posting to a PHD event that occurred on Thursday, October 30, 2008.³²⁹ A few online news articles also cited PHD observance in the UAE: in 2009, Wesgreen International School distributed pamphlets and pink ribbons and scarves to spread awareness³³⁰; and, in 2011, Raziqueh Hussain noted a number of women wearing pink hijabs in cafés and at the mall.³³¹ While Hussain cited the date that coincides with the American campaign, another group of Emirati women initiated an annual PHD event on October 27 but linked to the old PHD website in the article.³³²

“Healing and Hope,” a documentary about breast cancer survivors in the UAE, was produced through a partnership between Simply Check and SGKGI. According to the SGKGI website, the film was meant to target populations that are not participating in early detection screening.³³³ The film features six women, of various ages and ethnic backgrounds. Four of the six women featured in the video, Ameena, Boshara, Maryam, and Nivin, appeared to be of Emirati descent and the other two were English-speaking expatriates, Kristin and Arlin. Although four of the six women spoke Arabic, the Arabic was subtitled in English but the English was not subtitled.

The video highlights several themes that Emirati breast cancer awareness shares in common with initiatives elsewhere as well as many of the constraints and taboos that have been noted above and others, such as hair loss. A doctor practicing in the UAE

³²⁹ <http://bedouinprincess.blogspot.com/2008/10/pink-hijab-day-report.html>

³³⁰ <http://www.ameinfo.com/247763.html>

³³¹ http://www.khaleejtimes.com/Displayarticle09.asp?section=todaysfeatures&xfile=data/todaysfeatures/2011/October/todaysfeatures_October51.xml

³³² <http://www.ameinfo.com/247763.html>

³³³ <http://globalkomen.org/where-we-work/uae/healing-and-hope-documentary/>

claims that women will hide their condition to avoid treatment, as hair loss is an obvious sign of being “tainted” with cancer.³³⁴ In the video, Boshara questions, “how would I live without hair?” Likewise, Maryam, a police officer, says, “I can handle the chemo but my hair mustn’t fall out.”³³⁵ To demonstrate his support for his wife, Maryam’s husband shaves his head one day when they returned home from the clinic.

Familial support was an important element of the narratives in this video. Women are often concerned with the reactions of their family members, particularly their husbands, which may be a decisive factor in their participation in screening and treatment. In one article related to the responses of Emirati women to breast screening and treatment, they expressed fear that their husbands would not find them beautiful if they had to have a mastectomy and Emirati mothers articulated their anxiety about their daughter’s prospects for matrimony if they were diagnosed with the disease,³³⁶ similar to the concerns expressed by Saudi women. These fears typically result in women hiding the disease and waiting until the cancer is in an advanced stage before seeking treatment. The video was attempting to dispel the idea that families and communities will automatically reject women who are diagnosed with breast cancer. Boshara’s narrative, for example, described her husband’s, Aziz, enduring support. Before each treatment Boshara would say that she did not want to continue chemotherapy and Aziz would convince her to persevere, reminding her of her importance to their family. Aziz also claims that some men may consider looking for new wives when they discovered their wife’s diagnosis but he thought that this would be more fatal to his wife than the disease itself.

³³⁴ http://www.beautybeyondbreast.com/breast_cancer_abu_dhabi_dubai_uae.html#october27

³³⁵ <http://globalkomen.org/where-we-work/uae/healing-and-hope-documentary/>

³³⁶ http://www.beautybeyondbreast.com/breast_cancer_abu_dhabi_dubai_uae.html#october27

While some of the issues highlighted in this discussion are more relevant to the region—the necessity of hiding the disease, the effects on daughters' marriageability, and the rejection of “Western” medicine—others are relevant to women everywhere: for example, any woman who is diagnosed with breast cancer may not like the idea of losing her hair or the possibility of her husband not finding her attractive anymore if she has to undergo a mastectomy. This video attempts to unpack some universal concerns related to breast cancer. A few more of these universal issues, or “universalism,” as Tohidi (2002) calls them, were framed by the experiences of the two expatriates in the video. Arlin, who was in her second trimester, did not want to abort the fetus because she had been trying to get pregnant for years but her doctor informed her that after the first trimester the fetus can survive exposure to chemotherapy. The other, Kristin, was quite young when she was diagnosed and she worried that the treatment might make her infertile so her physician advised her to freeze some of her eggs so that she would be able to carry her own baby. Highlighting these universal concerns seems much more effective than reinforcing the modern/traditional binary that was particularly apparent in the *Al Jazeera* report related to breast cancer in Qatar, and suggests a cosmopolitan approach to breast cancer awareness. However, it is difficult to determine if all the happy endings showcased in this video were realistic scenarios or exuberantly optimistic ones. In other words, the video did not include narratives of women who faced social repercussions as a result of being diagnosis with breast cancer yet the widespread reluctance to participate in screening and treatment implies that the stigmatization of cancer continues to be a very real concern of women: for example, some women face abandonment by their husband and/or their daughters are

subject to desertion by their fiancé if the latter discovers that his future wife's mother has breast cancer.

Although the “Healing and Hope” video could inform multiple contexts, another video on the Simply Check website specifically catered to Emiratis. It included various governmental and popular culture personalities (television and radio) as well as artists, designers, and publishers from the UAE to celebrate “Pink October.” The participants tied together sentences in Arabic to encourage women to get screened for breast cancer. Some noteworthy sound bytes consisted of “treatment is what Islam urges you to do...God is with you” and “there’s no shame in illness but there’s in ignoring it,”³³⁷ demonstrating that treatment is grounded in religious values in this video as well. This video attempted to lay bare the shame of being diagnosed with a disease—which is reminiscent of Aida's co-worker's remark that disease is in Allah's hands, implying perhaps that people who are stricken with a disease must have somehow deserved this fate (although some of the "middle ground" perspective in Chapter 5 might frame illness as a *jihad* in which the affliction is not itself shameful, although certain behaviors enacted in response to it might be). While the “Healing and Hope” video migrated toward universalism, this video balanced it with its conspicuous localism.

The last several subsections have framed how breast cancer awareness organizations in the Arab region frame local and universal concerns, which will illuminate the next subsection's discussion on why PHD failed to gain organizational and/or popular support in the region.

³³⁷ http://wn.com/pink_october_breast_cancer_awareness_abu_dhabi_media

Discussion: Taboos and Weak Hubs

There were obvious themes threaded throughout these campaigns: women hiding the disease to prevent their social stigmatization or that of their daughters; forgoing treatment to avoid the physical manifestations of it; governments taking the lead in breast cancer awareness; taboos associated with Western medicine, related to the modern/traditional binary; and the importance of promoting treatment as Islamic. The American PHD campaign could only perhaps address the last issue, while the consequences of failing to address the first two could prove catastrophic for women who attempted to participate. PHD may have established contacts with BCFE in 2008 but the representative said that the organization only promoted it that year. Although the representative of Think Pink Qatar says that the organization has promoted PHD since 2009, it is subsumed within a larger gamut of events with sparse connections to the American campaign. I could not find any evidence that Saudi Arabia has ever participated and there may have been organic participation in the UAE but PHD was not backed by a local organization. This discussion will attempt to elucidate why the PHD campaign was not more successful in the Arab region.

The Pink Hijab Day section comes full circle, recalling El-Buri's statements that she had difficulty establishing connections with organizations in the region,³³⁸ which, as stated previously, has been theorized a crucial component of the mediation of collective action (Olson, 1965). An additional concern for collective actions that are principally disseminated online is mediation from online to offline spaces. Lim (2012) discusses the importance of the offline mediation of collective actions in an article about Egypt,

³³⁸ <http://www.hijabtrendz.com/2008/10/20/pink-hijab-day/>

although she had noted its importance in her previous writings on Indonesia as well (Lim 2003; 2006). In the case of Egypt, she notes, for example, that activists would purposefully “strategize” in the presence of cab drivers because they knew the drivers would spread the news (Lim, 2012, p. 13). Coffee houses, mosques, and soccer fields were also crucial venues for spreading awareness about the protest (Lim, 2012). However, the dynamic is much more complicated in cases of transnational collective action that primarily spread through the internet with little possibility of face-to-face contact with other supporters and no physical venues at which to mobilize and share information.

Klein (2000) argues that the internet is developing a novel form of protest that is “international, decentralized, with diverse interests but common targets” (as cited in Shangapour et al., 2011, p. 2). Similarly, Bennett (2005) discusses, “loosely linked “distributed” networks that are minimally dependent on central coordination, leaders, or ideological commitment...combine online and offline relationship-building aimed at achieving trust, credibility, and commitment as defined at the individual rather than the collective level” (p. 205). These descriptions well frame PHD. Bennett (2005) characterizes this as an important shift away from NGO advocacy, as he calls it, or from the necessity of organizational backing toward direct activism. Although Bennett (2005) is more concerned with networks and individual dedication to and participation in activism, which is referred to elsewhere as “disintermediation” (della Porta & Mosca, 2009, p. 166) and what I have cited as “organic,” he recognizes that the networks are “minimally” reliant on some form of organizational coordination or support through independent media outlets. Similarly, Lim (2012) highlights that the Egyptian Revolution would not have been possible without the ongoing activism of *Kefaya* and the April 6

Movement that began in 2004 and 2008, respectively (also see Aouragh 2012). Without physical or organizational support, one may encounter organic manifestations of support, as was the case with PHD in the UAE, which is a product of “virtual brokerage” (Bennett, 2005, p. 206) through network diffusion, but these displays of individual activism are likely to be scarce and have little overall impact on the larger society. In contexts in which it is even socially acceptable for women to wear a pink hijab, few people would know what it means without an accompanying information campaign. In the absence of organizational and/or widespread popular support, the network needs to be sufficiently large to support individual activism through network bridging.

Organizational support can principally function online through a hub that connects various disparate but interrelated networks and/or individuals (Cardoso & Lamy, 2011, p. 74), as was the case with the Genoa Social Forum, which connected networks to organize the G-8 protests in 2001 (della Porta & Mosca, 2009). According to Moraes (2001), virtual campaigns through hubs and nodes have “begun to make full use of their interconnection with the aim of sharing expertise, resources, costs, and space, and each node incorporates new users who potentially become producers and transmitters of information” (as cited in Cardoso & Lamy, 2011, p. 79). The case study in the next section, SlutWalk Morocco, is another good example of the hub-node dynamic. SlutWalk Toronto serves as a hub to disseminate information about SlutWalks throughout the world and to share content and resources (network linkages and supporters). SlutWalk Morocco has posted several of the same photos that SlutWalk Toronto shared on *Facebook* from SlutWalks in other cities around the world, which creates a type of continuity between campaigns that may share little else in common. For example,

SlutWalk Morocco and SlutWalk India both changed the name and purpose of the movements to conform to local norms but, at least in the case of SlutWalk Morocco, the posting of common content between the hub and the node allows SlutWalk Morocco to maintain loose connections to the hub that initially contributed to its founding.

However, while PHD established hub-node relationships with other countries, such as Bulgaria, Canada, and South Africa, and reinforced these relationships through listing the foreign events on its website, it failed to list the organic events that have occurred in the UAE, although online coverage of Emirati participation in 2011 continued to reference the American PHD campaign.³³⁹ Perhaps the campaign's relative success in spreading to Muslim-minority countries can be attributed to PHD's purpose—curiosity about Muslim women and the hijab—which is more germane to Muslim women in those countries than to Muslim women elsewhere (in Muslim-majority countries). However, since the PHD website has not been updated in recent years, it is difficult to determine if the American PHD campaign has even maintained contact with the activists in the Muslim-minority nations. Local activists in Muslim-minority countries may continue to sponsor events, as they have in the UAE, considering that local activists in South Africa,³⁴⁰ for example, have started their own *Facebook* page related to the PHD campaign. However, the presence of a weak hub, in this case, the American campaign, appears to undermine the effectiveness of online collective action even in relation to a campaign that requires little commitment; after all, donning a pink hijab once a year does not require a lot of effort.

³³⁹ http://www.khaleejtimes.com/Displayarticle09.asp?section=todaysfeatures&xfile=data/todaysfeatures/2011/October/todaysfeatures_October51.xml

³⁴⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/PinkHijabDaySouthAfrica/info>

However, in other contexts, like the Gulf States, it would require a great deal of effort to wear a pink hijab as it could result in social repercussions. One could say that PHD's failure to maintain relationships with local breast cancer NGOs in the MENA region and its scarce online presence contributed to its lack of support in the region; however, there is another more important factor that contributed to its lack of mediation—local social norms. Highly visible forms protests are common in the West, such as NiqaBitch, although, as mentioned throughout this dissertation, resistance among Muslim women often takes on subtle forms. Wearing a pink hijab in some Gulf communities would not only violate socially and legally policed standards of dress but it would also connect social actors to a disease that some Arabs will not mention by name. In these countries, participating in screening is itself an act of protest, which the docudrama about Aida conveys. In most of these countries discussed here, the governments are taking the lead in countering social taboos that prevent early detection because grassroots mobilization still incurs too many risks. Thus, one of the principle issues with PHD in the MENA region was the tactics, which would have been too jarring in some of the contexts. Perhaps one further taboo should be also be explored: do American hijabis, like El Buri, have a firm understanding of what the symbol they choose to rally around, the pink hijab, signifies for women in the MENA region? I admit that I do not because there are too many mixed and contentious understandings of the hijab that determine a woman's observance of it. For example, in Chapter 4, the opening of a women-only spa faced derision from Saudi women because so much of their opportunities are already qualified by the norms of gender segregation; likewise, they do not have a choice in regard to veiling. The pink hijab is perhaps less contentious in

environments where one can choose to veil or not and find others who subscribe to like interpretations of the modesty mandate but in contexts in which there is little choice the hijab may not be advanced as a symbol of activism.

The next section will discuss other taboos related to SlutWalk Morocco: Westernization and feminism. SlutWalk Morocco's connection to a Western feminist movement delegitimized it in the eyes of several of the commenters on its *Facebook* page.

SlutWalk Morocco (Woman Choufouch)

SlutWalk was borne out of the resistance of young Canadian women to the ignorant remarks of a police officer who told them they could avoid rape by not dressing like "sluts." In April 2011, more than 3,000 people took to the streets in opposition to the pervasive belief that women are at least partially responsible for being raped due to their lack of modesty. Within months the movement had spread throughout the globe—the hundreds of Facebook pages promoting citywide SlutWalk events are indicative of the popularity of the movement. The objectives of the SlutWalk movement have resonated with youth activists throughout the world, including those in Morocco. SlutWalk appears to serve as a form of branding, following Harvey (2009), to express solidarity with transnational youth activism and to demonstrate the universality of certain women's rights issues. Reactions to the Moroccan campaign on *Facebook* suggest that its connection to the Western movement through the SlutWalk branding has reduced its credibility among some Moroccans.

SlutWalks also faced a fair amount of criticism in the West but for different reasons that will be discussed in the next section along with a brief description of SlutWalk Toronto to better elucidate how SlutWalk changed when it arrived in Morocco.

Origins of the Global Movement

According to the SlutWalk Toronto (SWTO) homepage, the movement is attempting to “re-appropriate” the term slut³⁴¹ to dissipate its potential use as a device to control and bully women. SWTO also aims to counter victim-blaming, which is the tendency to blame women for the sexual violence they are subjected to. The contents of its *Facebook* page tends to link rape culture, which relates to the perpetuation of myths that explain people’s attitudes toward survivors and offenders (Burnett et al., 2009), to certain physical spaces and entities, like campuses, media, law enforcement, the military, and right-wing politicians and commentators. Since rape is an invisible crime, more so because it is tremendously underreported, it appears that SWTO links rape to places and people in an effort to make it more visible to potential SlutWalk supporters. However, SlutWalks are better known for their tactics than the movement’s purpose. A tactic that has arisen organically is the spectacle of the slut, which includes women decked out in lingerie, fishnets, and skimpy dresses to look the part of the stereotypical slut.

Although SWTO did not promote slutty forms of dress as its own tactic, the spectacle of the slut, which is appropriately rendered as a popular response to the movement, has been criticized in the West as has rallying under the slut title. O’Keefe (2012) argues that SlutWalk is an example of postfeminist activism, which perceives Second-Wave feminists as passé³⁴² and asserts its right to conspicuous consumption, including “designer breasts and vaginas,” and hypersexualization (also see Nguyen, 2013; Carr, 2013). Though the slutty spectacle attached to SlutWalks has not travelled to other countries, the movement in Morocco, for example, has nonetheless capitalized on the stir

³⁴¹ <http://www.slutwalktoronto.com/>

³⁴² This is perhaps an unfounded claim since SWTO promotes reproductive rights and challenges the hypersexualization of women through media.

caused by the facile application of the word “slut” and the associated spectacle. As Harvey (2009) argues, globalized culture is not limited to commodities but also extends to cultural movements. The “slut” of the “body protest” has become a commodity in this globalized movement, one that other cultures do not need to fully embrace and act out on the street to profit from the shock quality of it. That being said, the global influence of SlutWalk entails a double form of branding: the branding a social movement with international implications, which unveils a specific flavor of (“radical”) (post)feminism; and the branding of the “slut,” the sexualized female body consumed by the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975), which can be employed in other contexts to suggest a level of radicalism without necessarily reintroducing the stereotypical slut into the protest rallies. Consequently, the SlutWalk moniker serves as platform movement (Cammaerts, 2005), or a brand as I called it, under which activists take up local concerns related to sexual violence. The localized versions of the brand may not share the same purpose or name of the original movement but they sometimes receive a similar reception to the full-blown spectacle of the slut due to the second aspect of the branding and the concomitant radicalism associated with both.

This subsection has discussed the double branding of the SlutWalk movement, which includes “radical” feminism and the hypersexualized slut. The next subsection will describe how SlutWalk Morocco has embraced the first aspect of the brand, while attempting to distance itself from the second facet of it.

SlutWalk Morocco (SWM)

Majdoline Lyazidi and Layla Belmahi founded SlutWalk Morocco in August 2011. The *Facebook* page came online on August 13 and, within two weeks, over 3,000

Facebook users had liked the page.³⁴³ The *Facebook* “About” page states that “le problème du harcèlement se pose réellement chez nous au Maroc” [“harassment is a real problem in Morocco”] regardless of the woman’s clothing, age, or whether or not she is accompanied by another (male) person. It also notes that, since the topic of harassment is taboo, women tend to refrain from confronting the men who harass them. The page expresses solidarity with the global SlutWalk movement and frames the local movement’s rejection of “l’abus verbal et physique que subissent les femmes et le silence dans lequel elles sont confinées” [the verbal and physical abuse that [women] suffer in silence].³⁴⁴ Woman Choufouch boldly announces the subtitle of the SWTO campaign in its banner: “Because We Have Had Enough.” The “About” page demonstrates that the purpose of the SlutWalk Morocco campaign has shifted from a focus on rape to sexual harassment and, though it continues to address victim-blaming, it does so in relation to street harassment. The organizers also post content related to rape, some of which it gleans from the SWTO *Facebook* page, but it frames sexual harassment as the most pervasive form of sexual violence and, as such, the most pressing concern for Moroccan women.

Lyazidi claimed to have started with the name SlutWalk Morocco because the title “is catchy” and she believed that the movement would not have created the “buzz” that it has without the sexy name.³⁴⁵ However, she also expresses her desire to create a movement that was “100% moroccan, suiting our society, our community’s beliefs & values,” and she was not attempting to reproduce the same spectacle of “moitié nues !!”

³⁴³ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/09/07/morocco-slutwalk-gets-a-toehold/>

³⁴⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/pages/SlutWalk-Morocco/132681343491773?id=132681343491773&sk=info>

³⁴⁵ <http://accordingtohind.wordpress.com/2011/08/20/slutwalk-morocco-the-interview/>

[half naked] women that had occurred elsewhere.³⁴⁶ Thus, even upon the initiation of the campaign, Lyazidi said that the name was temporary because SlutWalk may be perceived as un-Moroccan and face a crisis of legitimacy due to assumptions related to cultural colonialism. However, the popularity of the movement worked against SlutWalk Morocco in this regard as the page received too many likes within the first two weeks, the time period it took the organizers to determine a more suitable name, to change it on *Facebook*. As a result, there are now two *Facebook* pages related to the campaign, Woman Choufouch and Slutwalk Morocco, although the former was never able to achieve the same level of support as the latter, at 2,317 likes and 8,574 likes, respectively (as of February 2014). The organizers therefore post identical content on both pages.

This section demonstrated how the SWM movement was localized to conform to Moroccan social norms, in name and purpose, and, although it was interested in being connected to the sexiness and controversy surrounding the global SlutWalk movement, it was quick to distance itself from the sluttiness of SlutWalk. The next section will briefly frame who might be included among Moroccan sluts.

Framing Moroccan Sluts

Several commenters disagreed with changing the name: Mehdi Elf even said, “enfin! ..vous êtes comme on vous aime..obéissantes !” [“Finally!... you are like we want you..obedient !”].³⁴⁷ Some women claimed that the use of the word slut in the name is apt considering that it well describes the way that men treat women on the street. Due to the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and the propensity to victim-blame, if a woman is

³⁴⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/pages/SlutWalk-Morocco/132681343491773?id=132681343491773&sk=info>

³⁴⁷ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=142816222478285&id=132681343491773&comment_id=447814&offset=0&total_comments=14

present on the streets of Morocco, she is eligible for the title of slut. Cultural taboos also cast women who speak out for their rights as sluts, especially those who confront harassers on the street, which was a common complaint of women in the HarassMap data and a common thread throughout the datasets. Some of the comments on the *Facebook* page rendered Moroccan “sluts” similarly to how they are perceived in the West—women and girls who defy societal standards of dress and sexual prowess. These standards include refraining from extramarital sex and wearing “traditional” clothing. The only attire that appeared beyond reproach in the Moroccan context was the hijab and djelleba, a loose fitting, ankle-length outer garments that Moroccans wear on top of their clothing when they go out in public. However, a picture posted on the SWM *Facebook* page disputes the idea that women who comply with “traditional” standards of dress are spared from harassment. The photograph shows from behind two women standing in the souk—a young, unveiled woman in short sleeves, standing next to a perhaps older one in djelleba and hijab. In the picture, a middle-aged man is grabbing the veiled woman’s buttocks, demonstrating that, although “traditional” clothing is often thought to deflect male “advances” in the street, complying with dominant social norms does not ensure that women will be protected from sexual violence in the street.

This subsection highlighted which women in Morocco are rendered as sluts—all of them. I am not suggesting, however, that the term slut is applied more liberally in Morocco than it is in the United States, especially in light of Rush Limbaugh's comment that women who use birth control are sluts³⁴⁸ and considering the pervasiveness of victim-blaming that suggests that if a woman is raped she is a slut “who had it coming.”

³⁴⁸ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c07V85Q_rqE&feature=related

The next subsection will highlight some of the qualitative themes related to the SlutWalk Morocco movement based on analysis of its *Facebook* content.

Reactions to SlutWalk Morocco

Some of the first posts offered by SWM demonstrated a few of the principal messages that the campaign was attempting to convey: “Me Draguer ne te donne pas le droit de me Harceler”³⁴⁹ [“Flirting with me does not give you the right to harass me”] and “NON CE N’EST PAS QUE JE PASSE PAR ICI QUE JE DEVRAIS AVOIR A SUBIR TA MISOGYNIE ET TON BESOIN DE PROUVER TA VIRILITE!”³⁵⁰ [“NO I AM NOT HERE TO SUFFER YOUR MISOGYNY OR YOUR DESIRE TO PROVE YOUR VIRILITY!”]. There was one comment posted to the first quote; says Abdelilah Oe, “Malheureusement, très peu font la différence entre la drague et le harcèlement ☹” [“Unfortunately, very few distinguish between flirting and harassing”]. In regard to the latter posting, one man, Yassine Bousbia, claims that both misogyny and misandry are learned, while virility is a characteristic, implying both that the movement leans toward man-hating and virility is a natural expression of masculinity, which some may employ as an excuse for harassment. Yasser Oudini states that harassment is not misogyny if it is directed at sluts. In another posting, Lyazidi avers that she is “not a body...sex toy...accessory...trash...slave...invisible...weak...I am not to be blamed for having a say. & My Life, it is My choice to make...I am not a thing.”³⁵¹ In this statement, she is clearly rejecting the objectification of women as is the case with other SlutWalk Morocco

³⁴⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=133660293393878&set=a.132896810136893.29059.132681343491773&type=1>

³⁵⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=133325033427404&set=a.132896810136893.29059.132681343491773&type=1>

³⁵¹ <https://fr-fr.facebook.com/notes/slutwalk-morocco/i-am-a-woman-get-used-to-it-thank-you/132805913479316>

postings.³⁵² Most of the comments related to this posting were supportive but Jalal Nadir remarks, “no matter what , women will always remain inferior beings .. that's what nature and reality dectate [*sic*].” There are multiple themes highlighted in this statement but I wanted to emphasize perceptions of masculinity and how men’s treatment of women is framed as “natural.”

SWM also shares a sign that was displayed at a SlutWalk march elsewhere (also posted on the SWTO page): “CLOTHING IS AN OPTION, RAPE ISN’T.”³⁵³ Most of the female commenters agreed that women should have the right to wear whatever they want. However, some expressed concern that the mentalities of Moroccan men would not change to facilitate this right. Wissal Njq claims that women dress for themselves to feel beautiful and that clothing does not really impact the incidence of sexual harassment. Njq says, “...même ma mère se fait emmerder dans la rue, et je peux t'assurer qu'elle sort pas en minijupe” [“...even my mother is screwed with in the street and I can assure you that she does not go out in a miniskirt”]. Noufissa Bentamy adds, “Meme celle en voile se font emmerder dans la rue, tant que tu es une femme tu te fais emmerder dans les rues” [“Even veiled women are screwed with in the street, if you are a women you get screwed within the streets”]. These women were responding to an antagonist, Ismael, whose comments were removed but it appears that Ismael linked the permissibility of harassment to Islam and the immodest dress of women. Fatil Farahate says in response to such claims, “L'islam est totalement CONTRE ces faits sataniques.” [“Islam is completely against these satanic acts”]. Souhail Oumama also refutes the connection

³⁵²https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=144801598946414&set=a.132896810136893.29059.132681343491773&type=1&comment_id=116234&offset=0&total_comments=33

³⁵³<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=133787820047792&set=a.132810690145505.29036.132681343491773&type=1>

between harassment and Islam by stating that the Qur'an tells believers to avert their gaze rather than looking at a woman's buttock for five minutes. Oumama also asserts that real men, as opposed to boys, can control their sexual arousal. These comments juxtapose the desire of women to dress however they would like to the dominant (male?) mindset that this desire challenges cultural norms, which are framed as religious responsibilities.

Even after changing the name of the movement, several opponents continued to assert that SWM runs counter to the dominant religious norms and others accused it of tainting the image of Islam, especially when the administrators posted a graphic in which a stereotypical Salafi man (*les barbous*) tells a woman and a little girl to dress more and more modestly and they do so gradually until they ended up in burqas and then he tells them that good Muslim women should stay at home. Despite the opposition to this depiction of (a version of) Islam, it highlights many of qualitative themes associated with the movement: veiling to prevent harassment; the pervasive judgment of women by men and other women; the impetus for women to remain at home to avoid harassment; and the male control of the public sphere. In response to the criticisms of this supposedly inflammatory posting, SlutWalk Morocco posted the following statement: "Don't you see that non-bearded men have the same comments about women's clothing?... This is not stereotyping Islam... this is a caricature illustrating Arab men/women in the public space that has some truth..[to] it." The accusations of being unIslamic perhaps relate to the perceived secular Westernization of the organizers, even though SWM posted very little content related to Islam.

A few postings attempt to demonstrate the universality of the issue of sexual violence, which is another pervasive theme in the datasets. SlutWalk Morocco shared a

link about a SlutWalk in India,³⁵⁴ with the following statement: “Ce n'est pas qu'en occident que ça se passe, ça se passe aussi en orient!” [“This does not only happen in the West, but it also happens in the East”]. The movement reiterates this point with a sign from another SlutWalk protest, which reads, “SEXUAL ASSAULT IS EVERYONE’S ISSUE!”³⁵⁵ Not everyone was convinced of the veracity of these statements. Several opponents claimed that the incidence of harassment is exaggerated by the campaign, especially in reaction to the picture of the man grabbing the woman’s buttocks in the souk.³⁵⁶ Several commenters argued that the photo was fake or enhanced.

This subsection was a general, not exhaustive, overview of the themes that I encountered in my analysis of SWM. The next subsection will highlight overtly defamatory criticisms related to the campaign’s perceived connections to the West and feminism.

Negative Reactions

Some, although not the majority, believe that women’s rights movements could result in the decline of moral values and the family, similar to what is perceived to have occurred in the West. “Maghribi Pour la Vie” claims that after “sluts” there will be a movement for queers, referencing the West as an example of progressive moral degradation. Others, like Kamel El Fassi, one of the most vocal antagonists on the SWM *Facebook* page, claimed that feminism has led to the decline of societies throughout the world. El Fassi writes, “La révolution sexuelle en France...a contribué à la disparition de

³⁵⁴ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PX_7Vpl3SHk&feature=share

³⁵⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=135676006525640&set=a.132896810136893.29059.132681343491773&type=1>

³⁵⁶ https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=153873258039248&set=a.132896810136893.29059.132681343491773&type=1&comment_id=140112&offset=100&total_comments=183

la famille, de la morale et des valeurs religieuses. Resultat: un vieillissement de la population, une baisse du dynamisme economique” [“The sexual revolution in France...contributed to the disappearance of the family, moral and religious values. Result: aging population and a loss of economic dynamism”].³⁵⁷ El Fassi also states that women’s rights progress into female dominance, using France as an example: “Les femmes considerent les hommes comme des chiens!!!...si elle divorce, elle garde les enfants, meme si elle a plusieurs amants !!!” [women consider men as dogs!...If she divorces, she keeps the children, even if she has several lovers!].³⁵⁸ El Fassi demanded on several occasions that SWM articulate its position on sexual liberation and abortion perhaps because he had looked at the SWTO website in which there is ample discussion of both issues. Izz Ad-Din Ruhlessin supports El Fassi’s rejection of feminism, stating, “[SWM is] Just one spasm of the collapsing feminists...”³⁵⁹ However, one should not assume that anti-feminist perspectives are limited to Moroccan and/or Arab contexts, although it does tend to be a loaded term among some men and women in the region (Fernea, 1998) and among right-wing commentators in the West (Basu, 2000).³⁶⁰

Kamel El Fassi as well as a few other commenters linked SWM and feminism in general, to various conspiratorial designs, including Communism, Fascism, and

³⁵⁷https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=153873258039248&set=a.132896810136893.29059.132681343491773&type=1&comment_id=140602&offset=100&total_comments=183

³⁵⁸https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=153873258039248&set=a.132896810136893.29059.132681343491773&type=1&comment_id=140999&offset=100&total_comments=183

³⁵⁹https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=143704539056120&id=132681343491773&comment_id=580776&offset=0&total_comments=19

³⁶⁰<http://www.forbes.com/sites/shenegotiates/2012/02/15/women-in-a-war-zone-republicans-betray-survivors-of-sexual-assault-and-domestic-violence/>
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/13/fox-news-liz-trotta-rape_n_1274018.html?ref=mostpopular

Zionism.³⁶¹ Perhaps the references to these “isms” are to solidify the point that these ideological paradigms (including the atheism associated with Communism) have no place in a Muslim monarchy.³⁶² The organizers refuted these insinuated connections to radical ideologies, explaining that “nous ne sommes pas un groupement de féministes extrémistes, chez nous les filles commencent à se faire harceler à l'âge de 10 ans ou avant et continue à l'être tout le long de leur vie, ce que nous dénonçons c'est cette sauvagerie qui confine les femmes dans la peur et la honte” [“We are not a group of radical feminists; in our society girls 10-year-old and younger start getting harassed and they are for most of their lives, this is what we denounce this savagery that confines women to fear and shame”]. Although Lyazidi sees herself as a “rationalist feminist,”³⁶³ some of the eight members of the Woman Choufouch team, four women and four men, do not self-identify as feminists.³⁶⁴ One of the administrators also assures El Fassi that communism and Eastern Europe have nothing to do with the SWM campaign.³⁶⁵

This subsection has framed some issues associated with the legitimacy of women’s rights movements stemming from the MENA region that are affiliated with Western feminist campaigns. The final subsection will discuss why Western feminism is stigmatized in the region and how SWM attempts to remain neutral in the religious/secular debate.

³⁶¹https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=266005260108511&id=132681343491773&comment_id=3670013&offset=0&total_comments=26

³⁶²https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=255264761184070&id=132681343491773&comment_id=3649665&offset=0&total_comments=39

³⁶³<http://accordingtohind.wordpress.com/2011/08/20/slutwalk-morocco-the-interview/>

³⁶⁴https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=159443494148891&id=132681343491773&comment_id=643382&offset=0&total_comments=34

³⁶⁵https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=255264761184070&id=132681343491773&comment_id=3650240&offset=0&total_comments=39

Discussion: Inclusivity and Allegiances

Many women's rights activists in the Arab world dispute being labeled as feminists; Fernea (1998) highlights the articulated rejection of feminism on several occasions during her travels in the region. She claims that it is often associated with "imperialism, colonialism, Zionism...depravity, birth control, individualism, no family concerns, no morals" (Fernea, 1998, p. 388). Hassan (2013) articulates a similar response to the second wave of Western feminism, which also frames some of the sentiments highlighted in the previous subsections:

Muslims can support wholeheartedly the legitimate issues and concerns of the early western feminist movement widely known as first wave feminism. However, there are good reasons for them to have reservations about many western feminist ideas...since the late 1960s and early 1970s with the emergence of the second wave of feminism...dominant western feminism has now become somewhat synonymous with a strong sense of individualism and with a lack of adequate concern for one's responsibilities to the family and to children. It has also contributed to creating a sense of rivalry between men and women, which has a bearing upon child development and is not conducive to a healthy family or society (p. 88).

He then frames why the problematics associated with the second wave of Western feminism reinforce the importance of further engagement with Islamic feminism.

I understand how he comes to this conclusion but it begs the question of which version of Islamic feminism would he consider legitimate? Certainly not the version promoted by Irshad Manji, which would allow women to reconcile their Muslim and lesbian identities (Chapter 5). What about the version advanced by "Refugee48" (Chapter 4) who says that marriage and motherhood are not her first priority because she wants to use her "God-given" talents to contribute to her community, which is also an important objective of Muslim communities. I have no qualms with Islamic feminism but what about secularist approaches for Muslim women who may not readily identify with Islamic feminism?

In dichotomous approaches to women's rights, movements must often position themselves as allies or enemies. As I discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, focusing on a particular issue related to the lived experiences of Muslim women allows them to artfully sidestep affiliations. SWM attempted to play out this evasive tactic when El Fassi demanded to know the movement's position on abortion and sexual liberation. The administrator replied that those issues were not salient to the purpose of the movement—to rally against sexual harassment—and refused to give him a definitive response. However, SWM, in initiating a movement that is connected to Western feminism, forewent its possibilities of neutrality among the secularist push and the Islamic pull. To briefly offer historical foundations of this dialectic, secularism is not a new phenomenon in women's rights discourses stemming from the MENA region. As Badran recounts, secularist approaches to women's rights were part of the rhetoric of nation building after the Ottoman Empire dissolved, which tied the liberation of women to the advancement of these newly-forming societies. However, the modern Islamist movement of the 1970s stalled (reversed?) the progression of women's rights within secular frameworks when Islamists began to reframe secularism as “unIslamic” rather than nationalistic (Badran, 2005). Since political religiosity and secularism are often played out on women's bodies, Islamist movements encouraged women not seek employment outside of the home and to dress modestly (Badran, 2005), which was noted by one of the bloggers in Chapter 4 who said that women in Egypt in 1960s and 1970s wore heels and miniskirts and were subjected to less harassment than veiled women are currently.

The secular and Islamic binary has been exasperated by the economic turmoil wrought by globalization as well as by wars targeting MENA region countries; as such,

Muslims are called upon to express their affiliations as either Eastern-leaning (“religious”) or Westernized (“secular”) Muslims (Badran, 2005), just as Westerners, who are tolerant of Islam, are dismissed as “cultural relativists” (see previous section on hijab discrimination). Basu (2000) articulates a similar dynamic in relation to Indian women’s rights groups. Says Basu (2000),

The discursive dimension centers on the charge that not only are the women who form the autonomous women’s movement Westernized elite but that appeals to women’s rights pit them against women who are primarily defined by their religious, cultural, and community identities (p. 79).

Although SWM does not itself connect women’s rights to either secularist or Islamic perspectives, it allows a space for different ideologies to converge; for example, Ismail’s belief that Islam allows harassment to police women’s modesty and Farahate’s vehement denial of this claim. Yet it appears that if a movement does not readily claim its allegiances, opponents feel the need speculate about them. SWM neither attempts to defame Islam, except perhaps by the name that it quickly changed, nor does it overtly promote any religion. Secularism among the Moroccan middle to upper middle class has been documented elsewhere (Robinson and Parmentier, forthcoming), which results in very pious to “Agnostic Muslim” Moroccans and everything in between, so why should the movement not cater to its intended audience rather than promote one or another arbitrary ideology that may not reflect the worldviews of the organizers?

The group could have arrived on *Facebook* as an autonomous anti-sexual harassment social movement but it would not have likely gained much attention. Many of the over 2,000 followers of the Woman Choufouch page likely only heard about it because they were already following the SWM page. The SlutWalk brand is what created the buzz around the movement travelling to Morocco, which Lyazidi herself

acknowledges. Social media networks are all about connections and the movement had a ready-made global base of support through its affiliation with the transnational SlutWalk movement. Cammaerts (2005) claims that one of the benefits of platform sites (hubs) is the ability of the groups to pool resources and a transnational following with bridges connecting overlapping networks is certainly an important resource for online collective actions. SWM's success online, partially facilitated through its global SlutWalk support base, may have contributed to the impressive gains it has contributed to offline, including its contributions to the reformation of Article 475 (see Chapter 3).

SWM could have aligned itself with other regional anti-sexual harassment movements, like HarassMap or Nasawiya from Lebanon, to perhaps claim more respectable allies from the perspectives of its opponents, but the resources to develop a map or an independent website are considerable so *Facebook* is an attractive option for new campaigns. SWM not only affiliates with the global SlutWalk movement through sharing links posted on the SWTO hub but it also promotes regional efforts, like HarassMap and The uprising of women in the Arab world. As such, SWM promotes local, regional, and transnational movements toward ending street harassment and gender violence so it is neither oriented toward particularism nor universalization, which Eschle (2001) claims is crucial to undermining polarized visions of feminism, like religious/secular. According to Eschle (2001), "While theorization of the feminist movements has tended toward the poles of universalization or particularism, in practice, various movements have followed a path between these poles, thus continually undermining this dichotomy" (as cited in Tohid, 2002, p. 856). SWM appears to have positioned itself in such a way: simultaneously, local, regional, and transnational.

Cosmopolitanism Praxis in the Collective Action of Muslim Women

I will briefly recapitulate the case studies outlined in this chapter before highlighting the vernacular cosmopolitan praxis associated with them. First, the hijab discrimination section discusses various obstacles to collective actions being taken up by the digital ummah network, which has demonstrated its ability to mobilize to decry incidents of Islamophobia and Zionism. Some women in the American hijabi fashion network were unsympathetic to discrimination against hijabis in the Boudlal v. Disney and Khan v. A&F cases, which may reflect socioeconomic divides that manifest both online and off. However, since hijabi fashion bloggers have rallied against other transnational cases of discrimination against hijabis, there is a possibility that the topic will eventually be taken up by the digital ummah network. The hijab discrimination case study also frames the difficulties in promoting collective action among women who share religious attachments in the same national context, difficulties that become exponentially more complicated when activists attempt to organize transnational collective actions through social media, as I discussed in the case study related to Pink Hijab Day. PHD faced obstacles reaching women in the MENA region because the movement lacked local organizational support and sufficient online presence to serve as a strong hub toward the promotion of individual activism. The American PHD movement also failed to consider local impediments to offline participation in the initiative, particularly related to taboos and localized standards of dress. SlutWalk Morocco, the third case study, which is a localized campaign that is connected to the global SlutWalk platform, is the most successful example of collective action among the three case studies. It was able to profit from the existing support base of the global movement, through partial acceptance of the

SlutWalk branding, but it also recontextualized the movement to conform to the Moroccan experience. SlutWalk Morocco has faced criticisms due to its loose connections with a Western feminist movement but it has refused to label itself as either a secularist or a religious women's rights movement; it has instead positioned itself as simultaneously universal and particular.

Clearly, SlutWalk Morocco is in the best position to be called a cosmopolitan movement. It connects to transnational, regional, and local women's rights groups toward addressing sexual harassment and a number of other concerns that affect women in Morocco as well as everywhere. It also attempts to be inclusive of all voices, including those of its opponents. Pink Hijab Day, on the other hand, is a transnational movement where it has travelled but its stated purpose lacks sufficient inclusivity to be considered cosmopolitan, although it could be considered as a form of Muslim cosmopolitanism. Hijab discrimination has the potential to become a transnational issue because it affects so many women throughout the world; tellingly, there have been cases that have encouraged mediation among localized networks, especially the el-Sherbini case. However, and this applies to the PHD case as well, for the hijab to become a symbol of activism, there needs to be more people on both sides of the hijabi/unveiled debate who come to accept that theirs is not the one and only true version of Islam. In the same vein, a truly cosmopolitan type of movement for hijabis would be for them to express solidarity with other movements that are against compulsory veiling. In any case, the dynamics of networks tend to encourage activism that attracts supporters with various identities to increase its chances of being heard and disseminated so perhaps activism will continue to move in this more cosmopolitan direction rather than toward greater homophily.

Conclusion

Multiple Cosmopolitanisms?

“So I was googling one thing or another when I found a post about the abject horror of a reporter in Saudi who was female and was therefore not permitted to stay in the men's section of Starbucks, umm boo hoo hoo. Now what grabbed my attention wasn't the article itself, but the comments. [...] Juuuuust so we're clear, Saudi is not a bunch of tents stuck together with roaming camels, men in turbans singing “Allah o akbar” raping women cause it's their right and having a harem of no less than 20. Oh and we don't circumcise our women, man that's just nasty and wrong on too many levels. Women are not locked up at home and any who are is a matter of the family culture not the country, still with me? Good. We're not backwards you morons, we're conservative, i.e. if you want to go and mingle with the opposite sex you go to a specific place. [...] Now my more important point is, since when do you get off judging people: “Close Starbucks!! They shouldn't support them by opening families sections” – umm, excuse me? I ain't complaining, and I need my coffee, so seriously man, GET LOST, I didn't hire anyone to be my speaker” (“Sweet Anger,” Saudi blogger).³⁶⁶

“Sweet Anger's” discussion highlights an important issue: is it possible to come to any type of consensus on social norms in a global society? The reporter probably thought that she was supporting a woman's ostensible right to sit anywhere she would like at Starbucks. “Sweet Anger's” denial of the reporter's “help” likely reflects her fatigue of being cast as a Muslimwoman (see Chapter 1) and of the suggestion of a cultural other that it is her place to intervene so that Saudi social norms could become more consistent with those of the cultural other through promoting a boycott. Cultural others may not object to women-only spas or gender-segregated schools, so in what venues is segregation acceptable and in what venues should it be rejected? Is it right for cultural others to interfere? Are the Saudi norms of gender segregation acceptable in the global society? Who decides?

Sweet Anger's discussion highlights some of difficulties in locating cosmopolitanism in general, particularly in online spaces where people are less apt to maintain basic levels of civility and where people access information that was not

³⁶⁶ <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/08/29/saudi-arabia-independent-women/>

necessarily intended for their consumption. Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to demonstrate that vernacular cosmopolitan praxis is not limited to the West; the likelihood of some Westerners reembedding into comfortable allegiances (Jansson, 2013) appears as likely as it is for cultural others of the West, as was demonstrated in the xenophobic responses to the hijab discrimination cases in Chapter 6 and in the Islamophobic discussions in the artificial hymen data (as well as the reactions to the NiqaBitch protest). Vernacular cosmopolitan praxis could be encountered online among people all over the world who create bridges between dissimilar people, engage disagreements in a civil manner, and articulate basic standards of behavior with which everyone could agree.

Cosmopolitanism, anti-cosmopolitanism, and distinct combinations of allegiances to the local and global do not appear to be limited to particular geographical regions or worldviews, yet the cultural hegemony of the West reinforces the assumption that Western values—including individualism, secularism, democracy, and capitalism—are natural and alternative worldviews are necessarily less so. I am not saying that non-Westerners do not also agree with these values to varying extents but some non-Westerners, like some Westerners, are able to understand the limitations of these idealistic values that typically play out through binaries (individual/collective, secular/religious, democratic/authoritarian, capitalist/communist) though these ideals rarely exist in absolute terms. For example, voters may support secular governments but their support of anti-abortion legislation is grounded in their religious beliefs. Since Western values are often assumed to be universal, vernacular cosmopolitan praxis in the West is limited as Westerners are not expected to justify their “universalism”—it is

presumed. Some Westerners who do exhibit vernacular cosmopolitan praxis are labeled as cultural relativists (see Chapter 6) for expressing traitorous support for non-Western ideals and/or practices, whereas non-Westerners who attempt to disrupt the incontestability of Western values are branded as anti-cosmopolitans for not subscribing to cosmopolitan (read: Western) norms.

This chapter will outline the vernacular cosmopolitan praxis that was unearthed in the chapters throughout this dissertation, discuss the theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions of this research, and suggest how future research could reorient cosmopolitanism away from its Western bias in scholarly engagement with the concept. The first section will recapitulate the vernacular cosmopolitan praxis that was framed in the previous chapters. The second section will highlight the contributions of this research: theoretically speaking, it will discuss why praxis is a more appropriate analytical tool than identity for understanding cosmopolitanism and it will scrutinize whether or not, under the current constraints of cultural hegemony, the cosmopolitan praxis of Muslims is limited to alternative forms of Muslim cosmopolitanism due to the perceived mutual exclusivity of Muslim and Western worldviews; it will underline how connective content analysis can excavate dynamics of online Muslim populations that are often masked through analyses of authoritative, homogenous networks dedicated to Muslims, one example of various types of Muslim cyberpublics; and, related to both the theoretical and methodological contributions, it will highlight the empirical uniqueness of this research style and the associated findings. The third section will discuss possibilities for future research on vernacular cosmopolitan praxis in cyberspaces because, while I center my research on Muslim women, other non-Western populations are also unlikely

to be considered cosmopolitan but they are probably less likely than Muslim populations to be labeled as anti-cosmopolitan.

Vernacular Cosmopolitan Praxis

The chapters of this dissertation highlighted various forms of vernacular cosmopolitan praxis. Some Muslims who have engaged in these praxes are not likely to be included in studies of cosmopolitanism but their dialogues demonstrate commitment to their own beliefs yet acceptance for others' views, including other Islamic interpretations and practices, even though divergent religious beliefs within the same religion are often some of the most difficult to tolerate. Other types of vernacular cosmopolitan praxis that I have identified include the following: expanding the transnational connective memory to include the voices of Muslim women, especially the voices that attempt to debunk stereotypes of Muslim women or the Muslimwoman; dialogue and network linkages that encourage interaction between dissimilar people (even among Muslims with dissimilar beliefs); offering countersentences to dominant political and religious discourses; dialogue that encourages inclusivity and civility; and the articulation of basic levels of comportment online and off, iteratively developed through online discussions. These praxes are perhaps less likely to be present in anonymous cyberspaces because interlocutors are not required to maintain civility due to the unlikelihood of ever meeting the people that they engage with online in face-to-face situations but it is clear that some interlocutors actively promote these behaviors.

I also analyze ways that networks and behaviors in cyberspaces facilitate and constrain online vernacular cosmopolitan praxis. Benedikter and Fitz (2011), for example, discuss how social media contribute to collective introspection and imaginings of what

offline communities could/should be; however, they also discuss how these spaces can be used as mechanisms for social policing (also see Jansson 2009; 2013). Furthermore, Jansson (2013) suggests that people rarely use the internet to meet “others,” due to the tendency to reembed fragmented postmodern subjectivities into comfortable allegiances, but Wise (2009) suggests that there are some social media users who proactively engage “others” online—the “transveral enablers” (Onyx et al., 2011). Onyx et al. (2011) also suggest that networks can encourage cosmopolitanism through everyday interactions because changing perspectives within networks can contribute to far-reaching results through the emergence of bottom-up change and their self-organizing and reorganizing tendencies. Similar to the network evolutions and realignments that Onyx et al. (2011) discuss, Couldry (2008) posits that certain memes are more readily mediated within certain spaces and into others, which suggests that, while certain digital texts and multimedia forms will circulate in dominant transnational networks and achieve high degrees of notoriety, other memes will be relegated to localized networks and scarcely achieve even vague recognition outside of them.

Chapter 3, “Conversations in Cyberspaces,” discusses how the digital self-expressions of Muslim women are not only subtle resistance against local taboos and stigmas but they have the potential to be mediated into and within the dominant transnational connective memory. I situate this expansion of the connective memory as a form of vernacular cosmopolitan praxis, particularly the narratives that challenge stereotypes of Muslim women. Alas, it appears that the narratives that comply with the stereotype of Muslim women as victims (cooke, 2000) are more readily mediated into the dominant transnational connective memory, although the narratives of empowered

Muslim women may have some impact on localized networks, particularly because the underlying issues that these Muslim women were speaking out against—silences and disappearances, dialogue incited by the martyrdoms of women—are universal to varying degrees within Muslim communities. Interestingly, the Western media showcasing of “safe,” pro-Western Muslim women offers stereotypically “silenced” Muslim women the opportunity to demonstrate their vernacular cosmopolitan praxis. A few unlikely cosmopolitan Muslim women in Chapter 3 were niqabis who politely asked the native informant spokespeople to respect their Islamic beliefs as the former respect theirs.³⁶⁷ Their interactions could also be perceived as Muslim cosmopolitanism but I argue that they do suggest vernacular cosmopolitan praxis because their stances also challenge widely accepted stereotypes regarding Muslim women who would likely be framed as “extremists” due to their relatively “radical” approaches to the Islamic modesty mandate. In relation to challenging the Western bias associated with conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism, this chapter demonstrates some commonalities between the lived experiences of Muslim women in the “East” and the “West,” particularly the self-disappearing tactic that Muslim women take up to protect themselves regardless of context.

Chapter 4, “Women’s Agency and Muslim Marriage,” highlights several forms of vernacular cosmopolitan praxes. The first is the articulation of counterclaims by social media users, especially spinsters, to the dominant political, religious, media, and socially privileged discourses on spinsters that frame it as a “crisis.” While some spinsters were simply attempting to normalize the status of unwed women in Muslim communities,

³⁶⁷ “Unlikely” because theoretical frameworks on cosmopolitanism would not typically classify niqabis as cosmopolitans.

others linked it to the lack of suitable prospective grooms and/or to their desire to contribute to their communities in ways other than producing offspring. The second form of praxis was linked to communal organic responses to the perceived lack of available men in some Muslim communities: Muslim women opting into polygynous marriages. Some Muslims elucidated their outright rejection to this option but another group of unlikely cosmopolitans, those who were not enthusiastic about second wife marriages but said that they would agree to them in certain circumstances, attempted to devise communal obligations related to ensuring that these arrangements were undertaken in a proper manner. Although the issue of polygyny is somewhat universal in some Muslim and non-Muslim communities, this is not why I consider it a form of cosmopolitan praxis. I suggest that it is because the Muslim women who attempted to devise communal norms related to polygyny were not themselves affected by polygynous arrangements but they were tolerant of others practicing it and they demonstrated concern for protecting the rights of women, first wives in particular, rather than flat rejections of the practice. This cosmopolitan praxis is similar to that of the niqabis who are true to their own beliefs and practices but accepting of dissimilar ones. This approach, expressing acceptance within defined basic standards, may be more effective among Muslims who believe that polygyny is an acceptable practice than attempting to convince them that their beliefs are misguided.³⁶⁸ Conversely, other Muslim women did articulate flat rejections of polygyny but they did so by grounding them in the right of Muslim women to themselves develop Qur'anic hermeneutics, which speaks to a form of Muslim cosmopolitan praxis. This

³⁶⁸ Similar to Fernea's (1998) conversations with women's right activists who were attempting to eradicate female genital mutilation, these activists typically found that it was more effective to educate populations about the effects of this tradition than to simply tell them that it was wrong. Some activists also said that the campaign in the West to cast FGM/FGC as anti-modern polarized local activism against the practice.

could also be perceived as vernacular cosmopolitan praxis more generally if these discussions were interpreted as speaking to this right among women in all religious communities. The third form of praxis is related to developing networks and bridges of activism that address universal issues affecting women. Challenging the stigmatization of spinsterhood and sexual harassment are forms of activism that were highly mediated within local and transnational networks, speaking to their universal salience among Muslim and non-Muslim women. Chapter 4 demonstrates that the online activism of Muslim women is often similar to non-Muslim activism, again, frustrating the dichotomy of East and West. On a final note, the women who were speaking out against street harassment and the stigmatization of spinsterhood could be promoting the cosmopolitan praxis of women demanding basic standards of comportment from men on the street and within the institution of marriage (the type of marriage in which women would not be relegated to subordinate positions), similar to the women who outlined basic communal norms in relation to polygynous marriages.

Chapter 5, “Communities and *Ijtihad*,” principally discusses cosmopolitan praxis related to Muslims who are able to articulate tolerance for divergent interpretations of Islamic practices, similar to the findings in Chapter 3. Chapter 5 was mainly interested in demonstrating that the methodology that scholars employ to study online Muslim populations could result in masking cosmopolitanism among them due to the general focus on homophilic networks. Homogenous networks of Muslims are not often the ripest cyberspaces for analyzing how Muslims engage with “other” Muslims about differing perspectives on beliefs and practices and with non-Muslims in efforts to normalize relations between the West and Islam. In the topical network related to Muslim lesbians, I

discovered a middle ground (not another typology) between “traditional” and “liberal” Muslims that accommodated both the rejection of Muslim homosexuality and acceptance of the right of queer Muslims to marry in order for them to avoid *zina* (extramarital sexual relations). The perspectives of “liberal” Muslims who support queer Muslim rights also engage in a form of cosmopolitan praxis by expanding the scope of Islamic knowledge through *ijtihad*, similar to the contributions of Muslim women in offering their own interpretations of the Qur’an, which advance Islamic knowledge beyond the typical reliance on traditional male hermeneutics. Although there were a few hijabis who expressed tolerance of unveiled women, the overwhelming majority tended to believe that unveiled women were not complying with an important Islamic mandate and that they were disrupting the solidarity of the (pro-hijab) ummah. Both of these networks were transnational, so perhaps the transnational hijabis fashion network does speak to a form of Muslim cosmopolitanism but the transnational topical network related to Muslim queerness is more illustrative of vernacular cosmopolitan praxis. This topical network is also an activist network related to a universal issue, similar to spinsterhood and sexual harassment, and, as such, it advances basic rights that everyone should enjoy. This chapter disputes the widely accepted truth that the West is more tolerant than the East, highlighting the examples of hijabis in both North America and North Africa being denied entrance to certain venues and opportunities because of their hijabis and Muslim queers forming their own communities because they are rejected among LGBTQ communities in the West due to their racialized religion and perhaps their skin color, just as they would be snubbed for not conforming to the dominant cultures of the East in relation to their sexuality and, in some cases, their avoidance of heterosexual marriage.

Chapter 6, “Online Collective Action Case Studies,” discusses the relative successes of few collective actions created by and/or related to Muslim women that had the potential to develop into vernacular cosmopolitan praxis. Hijab discrimination is a universal issue among Muslim communities, which would suggest that this concern might stimulate Muslim activism and cosmopolitan praxis, but reactions to the plights of a few American hijabis who faced discrimination in the workplace did not animate the digital ummah network, larger Muslim communities, or even hijabis networks based in the United States. Despite the denial within the hijabi fashion network, this is perhaps related to the hijab being a contested issue within Muslim communities but it is also related to American hijabi fashion bloggers attempting to normalize the American hijabi identity through acquiescence and expressing simultaneous allegiances to the West and the ummah. This, at times, leads to contradictory stances—for example, encouraging the uniform practice of veiling yet failing to support Muslim women’s right to religious accommodation in the workplace—but, although these multiple allegiances could be considered a form of vernacular cosmopolitan identity, it is difficult to consider their positionalities as examples of cosmopolitan praxis. Vernacular cosmopolitan praxis is more appropriately rendered as activism toward ensuring that all populations, including those who wear religious symbols on their heads, are employable. In regard to Pink Hijab Day, the initial purpose of the initiative was more inline with vernacular cosmopolitan praxis but when it shifted its purpose from stereotypes, which is relevant to Muslim women everywhere (see Chapter 4), to awareness about why women wear the hijab, its salience for some Muslim women was compromised. The American PHD campaign was not perhaps sufficiently sensitive to local taboos in Muslim-majority countries but it may

have had greater success in the Arab region if the PHD network was large enough to promote personal participation in the campaign in the absence of local organizational support. PHD could still be considered a form of Muslim cosmopolitan praxis but its redefined purpose and the lack of dynamism of the associated network limited its translatability in some contexts. The SlutWalk Morocco campaign offered the best example of vernacular cosmopolitan praxis of the three case studies, but HarassMap and the Muslim spinsterhood campaign were also good examples of it, because it locally contextualized a universal issue. SlutWalk Morocco was able to develop a support base within Morocco, because the organizers appropriately contextualized the movement to comply with Moroccan norms, and among transnational supporters of the global SlutWalk movement. Although the movement faced some derision from commenters who were fearful that advances in women's rights would lead to the deterioration of social of familial norms, particularly due to the movement's connection to Western feminism, the organizers were able to artfully claim multiple allegiances toward the greatest possible inclusivity, unlike the hijabi fashion bloggers who were limited to one or another allegiance at a time and PHD that marked its dedication to hijabis in Muslim-minority countries at the expense of greater inclusivity.

Research Contributions

This dissertation research has attempted to address several gaps in the literature related to cosmopolitanism and the interactions of online Muslim populations. I will discuss the theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions of this thesis in the next three subsections.

Theoretical Contributions

I argue that cosmopolitanism was not originally intended to advance the superiority of any specific culture or set of beliefs but instead referred to the shared sense of humanity between dissimilar people. However, beginning with the Christian Empire, rulers began to link cosmopolitanism with the superiority of Western cultures and the universalism of the Christian faith. This trend continued when cosmopolitanism was reintroduced into philosophical debate during the Enlightenment period and the ideal contributed to the normative foundations of European imperialism under the aegis of the “white man’s burden.” Over the centuries since the concept was first introduced, cosmopolitanism has become synonymous with Western localities, values, universalism, and/or identities. Although contemporary theoretical discussions of the concept have stretched its meaning to include multicultural tolerance and processes of interconnectedness, they continue to tacitly connect the propensity with the West by excluding non-Western localities, values, universalism, and/or identities from the purview of scholarly engagement with cosmopolitanism. In order to advance beyond the Western bias associated with cosmopolitanism—which should actually be conceptualized as Western cosmopolitanism—it is necessary to return to the foundations of the concept that entailed simultaneous dedication to the local and the cosmos through the theoretical commitment to vernacular cosmopolitanism, which has been framed elsewhere by Werbner (2006), Pollock et al. (2000), Appiah (1998), Cohen (1992), and so forth.

My contribution to this theoretical framework is that vernacular cosmopolitanism could be studied empirically, which I conceptualize as vernacular cosmopolitan praxis, through analyzing interactions between dissimilar people in transnational cyberspaces

rather than focusing on identities or contexts. Certainly context plays a role in determining the topics and collective actions that social media users discuss and collectivize around, but I suggest that it does not have to be the central component of the analysis. I also demonstrate that vernacular cosmopolitanism praxis is more likely to be exhibited by non-Westerners because cosmopolitanism is already presumed to be an element of Western consciousness. I analyze the discussions of women who subscribe to a common identity, Muslim woman, in transnational cyberspaces to offer a theoretical engagement with cosmopolitanism that is not limited to Western people and places. Furthermore, although there are mixed opinions as to whether or not online spaces enable or undermine vernacular cosmopolitanism praxis, the anonymity that online spaces provide may contribute to some social media users being more forthright about their beliefs rather than restraining them due to concerns about political correctness and politeness and they may enable others to discuss social taboos that they would avoid in face-to-face conversations.

Methodological Contributions

Studies of online Muslim populations often focus on geographical communities transcribed online, Islamic discussion forums, or analyses of authoritative websites related to Islamic knowledge. There are also studies of Muslim communities that only exist online that cater to particular groups of Muslims based on locales, practices, or preferences regarding the consumption of religious knowledge. I introduce an innovative methodological approach to studying social media users based on topical and collective action networks rather than identity or context: connective content analysis. I collected data in transnational cyberspaces, rather than networks oriented specifically to Muslims,

because they tend to be spaces that are more conducive to studying interactions between Muslims of various stripes and between Muslims and non-Muslims. This methodology also draws attention to networks and bridges between networks, which were central to my data collection.

Yet perhaps the most interesting aspect of the connective content analysis is being able to put the different datasets into conversation based on network bridges and common qualitative themes. For example, by putting the datasets into conversation I was able to discuss the parallels between the silenced voices of Muslim women regardless of context. These conversations between the various datasets were able to elucidate the phenomenon of spinsterhood beyond dominant discourses and countersentences offered by spinsters. I was also able to compare case studies from different contexts to gauge their relative success through their support bases and inclusivity; ultimately, inclusivity appears to be a much more useful indicator than tolerance in evaluating vernacular cosmopolitanism praxis.

Empirical Contributions

Apart from the theoretical and methodological contributions, which overlap to a certain degree with the empirical contributions, part of the reason I decided to conduct this research is because there are few empirical scholarly analyses of the online participation of Muslim women in transnational cyberspaces. Since analyses of online populations of Muslims tend to be limited to geographical locations, the subjectivities of women are often underrepresented, as was the case in my Masters research (2007-2009) on the Francophone Moroccan blogosphere, the Blogoma, in which the network was comprised of very few Moroccan women. This is not the case in Saudi Arabia or Egypt,

for example, but often times the most influential bloggers within Arab blogospheres are men. Furthermore, Muslim women in traditional Muslim communities tend to be underrepresented because men are charged with disseminating Islamic knowledge and some Muslim women will not co-mingle with men online. Yet in “liberal” Muslim communities female Muslim scholars maintain a strong and growing presence in online spaces, comprising one of only a few groups of Muslim women who ostensibly deserve scholarly attention.

It is not difficult to understand why scholars would avoid analyses as messy as this because the data collection for particular groups based on geographical locations, like my study of the Blogoma, is much more straightforward but, since early on in my analysis I recognized parallels between the lived experiences of Muslim women in various contexts, I believe that these parallels are important to undermining the “Clash of Civilizations”³⁶⁹ and the stereotypes of Muslim women (often read: Arab women). Thus, in order to promote a feminist, antiracist, anti-imperialist research agenda, one of my primary motivations toward this end was challenging the East/West binary. By focusing on topics and collective actions, I could shy away from presenting a transnational analysis that reinforced this binary. Furthermore, all of the topics and collective actions for which I collected data are relatively unknown within academic circles. For example, I found 37 journal articles in the Arizona State University library database on “Muslim lesbians,” the most well known topic among academic circles, but I only found 3 and 4, respectively, for HarassMap and “artificial hymen,” the second and third most popular topics/collective actions. Thus my analysis has introduced issues that are perhaps

³⁶⁹ <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/48950/samuel-p-huntington/the-clash-of-civilizations>

unknown outside of the networks related to these topics and collective actions within which Muslim women interact online.

One of the most complicated issues, aside from the data collection, was operationalizing vernacular cosmopolitan praxis because, as I discussed in Chapter 1, there were not any empirical studies that I could find that had measures that could be easily translated from surveys to online spaces. Roudometof's (2005) local/cosmopolitan continuum based on perspectives related to patriotism and political and economic policies were not readily available, not that I am fully convinced that these measures are adequate, particularly in relation to discussions of women's rights in transnational space. Mau et al. (2008) based their measures of cosmopolitanism on transnational contacts but they appeared to be mainly interested in multicultural tolerance, which I would argue is distinct from cosmopolitanism. Out of necessity, I devised my own measures, which I attempted to formulate based on their inclusivity and what I had observed in online dialogues among Muslim women. One of my measures, universal standards of comportment, for example, could be contentious—would universal standards necessarily reject polygyny?—but I discuss them in conjunction with truly basic standards, like a woman being able to walk down the street without someone grabbing her breasts. Although this may appear to be an insignificant measure for a grandiose ideal like cosmopolitanism, it is in very mundane issues that people from everywhere can agree and begin conversations about other more difficult topics. Certainly, a more contentious starting point like secularity might ostracize many people and it is not even a universal standard in the West where it is championed. From my perspective, it is important to

analyze cosmopolitanism, not just from an empirical standpoint, but also from one that is inclusive because, as I see it, inclusivity is a crucial component of cosmopolitanism.

Future Research

As mentioned in the Chapter 1, Hoesterey (2012) framed the movements of Indonesian self-help gurus as “tolerance without universalism” (p. 55), but his characterization of them as an “alternative global discourse” is perhaps more appropriate than labeling them as movements that lack universalism. Although I agree that, since the guru movements are commodified, they lack the appeal of vernacular cosmopolitan praxis and can more appropriately be framed as banal cosmopolitanism, the message of these movements, promoting “prophetic cosmopolitanism,” is arguably relevant to 20% of the world population that shares the Muslim identity. The former categorization, “tolerance without universalism,” is problematic because Hoesterey fails to define what he means by universalism. If by universalism he is implying the inclusion of Western values, this begs the question of why this is a requisite element of establishing movements as cosmopolitan? I am not suggesting that Western norms should necessarily be excluded but why is it assumed that they should play a central role in determining whether a movement or worldview advances (inclusive) universalism?

Collective actions initiated by Muslims often engage topics that appeal to transnational, transcultural aspects of the lived experiences of Muslims, some of which include the following: rendering Muslim lifestyles in the modern era, countering Islamophobia, establishing rubrics on what is considered authentic religious knowledge, and articulating Islamic practices. These collective actions suggest an “alternative global discourse” more than “tolerance without universalism,” or at least no more “tolerance

without universalism” than one would expect to encounter among cosmopolitan movements stemming from the West. This is why I imply that some forms of cosmopolitan praxis that took shape in my analysis of the datasets could be classified as “Muslim cosmopolitanisms,” which are forms of universalism that are directed at Muslims throughout the world. These forms of “Muslim cosmopolitanism,” like the hijabi fashion network and women expanding the scope of Islamic knowledge through their hermeneutics, often express multiple allegiances but they do not so much reject Western populations and values by design but due to global systemic constraints related to their guilt by association of anti-Western sentiment and terrorism through their affiliation with Islam. Muslim cosmopolitanism, even forms that coincide with Western values, often has little choice but to sidestep the inclusion of Western worldviews and secure solidarity among Muslims transnationally because Muslim cosmopolitanisms are often automatically framed as anti-Western. There are also Muslim cosmopolitanisms that do reject Western cultures, such as the hypersexuality of films and television programming, but it should not immediately follow that Muslim cosmopolitanisms inherently reject individualism, democracy, secularity, and free market economics.

Advancing qualified versions of cosmopolitanism is part and parcel of global hegemony but it should not be assumed that these modified cosmopolitanisms are limited to Muslims or the East. The universalism of non-Western cosmopolitanism that is judged and found wanting is measured by the standards of another form of qualified cosmopolitanism: “Western cosmopolitanism” (Pollock et al., 2000). Similarly, universalism is not universalism, but Western universalism. To move away from the assumption that cosmopolitanism is an inherently Western ideal and all other forms, like

Muslim cosmopolitanism, are necessarily derivative and perhaps unauthentic, one must recognize that when scholars invoke the term cosmopolitanism they are typically referencing Western cosmopolitanism unless specific qualifiers are introduced. Perhaps this is an important starting point for future studies of cosmopolitanism.

This dissertation has demonstrated that vernacular cosmopolitan praxis could be found among Muslim women from the East and West in cyberspaces, even among the most unlikely cosmopolitans from the standpoint of Western cosmopolitanism, which tends to be a homogenizing force. While the social media use of Muslim women is not markedly different from the ways that other groups use these platforms—sharing political and religious perspectives, joining supportive communities, networking with likeminded people—as an underrepresented group in media and public spaces, their voices have the potential to balance widely accepted truths about them. Cyberspaces are as likely to foster as they are to constrain cosmopolitan praxis and, as such, the cosmopolitan praxes found therein are the result of how people use the technology, including the following: promoting mutual tolerance, supporting activism related to universal issues, reinforcing hierarchies, engaging in subtle resistance, stereotyping, trolling, bridging, and so on. Online spaces are channels through which everyone with sufficient means can share their voices yet certain voices continue to weigh in more heavily. To advance cosmopolitanism as a concept that truly reflects the cosmos, more research of non-Western cosmopolitanism should be undertaken to advance the concept beyond Western universalism, norms, and identities. Certainly highlighting vernacular cosmopolitan praxis among non-Westerners is a way to gain greater understandings of associated

ontologies and move toward greater global inclusivity for both the imagined East and the West.

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APPENDIX A

THEMATIC CODES FOR HARASSMAP

Age: related to older women and young girls facing sexual harassment.

Apathy: underscores the reaction of the Egyptian bystanders to sexual harassment on the street.

Blame women: commenters point out that women are summarily blamed for being sexually harassed for some of the following reasons: for dressing immodestly, walking in a suggestive fashion, not covering their hair/face, being out of their homes at night (or, in some cases, at all), being in crowds, not having a male with them, and so on.

Causes: broaches more generally the causes of sexual harassment without necessarily blaming women.

Characteristics: while some attempt to ascribe specific traits to harassers, many commenters believe that Egyptian men and boys from all walks of life harass women.

Class: some commenters claim that members of the lower class perpetrate harassment, but others assert that rich and middle class men are just as likely to harass women.

Clean revolution: some interlocutors discuss how sexual harassment disappeared during the revolution or how some Egyptians promoted the myth that it disappeared to reinforce the “cleanliness” of the revolution. This theme is also linked to Western media highlighting the rapes and harassment of women during the uprisings (e.g. Lara Logan).

Community: some believe that the lack of a sense of community contributes to the pervasiveness of sexual harassment, which is an attempt to explain the “apathy” of bystanders. This theme is also related to the past sense of community when people would intervene when women were harassed in the street.

Consciousness: related to my argument that Egyptian women have development revolutionary consciousnesses through their participation in the uprisings. Women are rejecting all forms of subjugation, including harassment.

Cool: some interlocutors suggest that men harass women to appear “cool” to their peers.

Crowd: commenters suggest that women avoid crowds to prevent being harassed and/or discuss incidents of a woman/women being harassed by a group of men.

Definition: related to how sexual harassment is defined.

Double standard: related to women carrying all the blame for sexual harassment while men are excused for their behaviors.

Education: interlocutors point out that educating Egyptians toward mutual respect and advancing education for women is necessary to combat sexual harassment.

Empower: discussions related to the empowerment of women through initiatives such as HarassMap, speaking out, storytelling, and so forth.

Exaggeration: related to remarks that women are exaggerating the seriousness of incidents they encounter on the streets or/and exaggerating the pervasiveness of sexual harassment.

Expose the pervert: one of the HarassMap interventions is to “expose the pervert” or speak out publically against harassers either through the interactive map or in the street.

Female appropriateness: related to societal constraints on gender appropriateness for Egyptian women. Also related to taboos.

Flirt: related to people minimizing the seriousness of sexual harassment by referring to it as flirting.

Futile: related to suggestions that interventions against harassment are futile.

Gaze: related to averting one’s gaze (also what some commenters suggest is the most important aspect of the Qur’anic modesty mandate).

Hate: related to women’s hatred of men for being constantly harassed by them.

Helpless: related to the feeling of helplessness women experience after being sexually harassed.

Hijab or veil: related to whether or not veiling thwarts harassment.

History: related to the history of sexual harassment in Egypt, including past and present media coverage of it.

HM effectiveness: related to HarassMap’s effectiveness.

HM intervention: methods by which HarassMap proposes to counter sexual harassment.

Home: related to suggestions that women should stay home to avoid harassment.

Inferiority: related to the perceived inferiority of women in the Egyptian society.

Internalize: related to how the treatment of women begins to affect their self-perceptions and how they interact with society. Also related to “self-loathing.”

Intervention: related to strategies that Egyptian women employ or propose to minimize their exposure to harassment or strategies.

Kids: related to children being harassed and, those as young as 7, harassing women.

Law: related to governmental measures that have been introduced to address sexual harassment.

Male protection: related to men protecting women against harassment either through their presence with women on the street or through intervening

Male reaction: related to the possibility of men retaliating against women if women speak up or act out against harassment. Also related to “returning violence.”

Male responsibility: related to holding men accountable for harassing women.

Marriage: related to the belief of some Egyptians that the delayed age of marriage contributes to the pervasiveness of sexual harassment.

Masculinity: related to harassment being an exhibition of virility. Also related to “power” and “male public.”

Media: related to how media contribute to the objectification of women through internet pornography and graphic sexuality in film and television.

Men lack control: related to the idea that men are biologically predisposed to harassment and cannot control their violence against women.

Mixing sexes: related to the argument that the mixing of the sexes contributes to sexual harassment.

Mubarak or rule of law: related to the general corruption of the former regime and its failure to protect and ensure the rights of Egyptian citizens and their subsequent disempowerment.

Myth: related to myths that circulate related to harassment (such as the age, modesty, beauty, gait, etc. of the woman is what encourages harassment).

New gov't: related to the new government in terms of displacing the corruption of the old regime with a new way of life that addresses issues like sexual harassment. Also, discusses points of view of new leadership, such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

Normal or norm: related to sexual harassment becoming normalized in the Egyptian society.

Object or dehumanize: discussions related to the objectification of women.

Patriarchy: some discussions claim that harassment is symptomatic of patriarchy.

Police: related to police officers either participating in sexual harassment or failing to intervene when women are harassed.

Poverty: some commentators link harassment to poverty.

Power and male public: related to men exerting their power over women and over the public sphere through sexually harassing women.

Rage: related to the feelings of rage women experience for being constantly targeted by harassers.

Ramadan: related to sexual harassment during Ramadan and Eid.

Rearing: some interlocutors believe that the way men are raised to believe they are superior to women contributes to sexual harassment.

Recognition: related to the acknowledgment that sexual harassment is a problem.

Religion: related to how Islam influences perceptions of harassment. Western interlocutors link the prevalence of sexual harassment to the status of women in Muslim countries. Also, Egyptian religious leaders sometimes place the blame for harassment squarely on women.

Return violence: related to Egyptian women returning violence against men who harass them.

Self-loathing: related to women's sense of self-disgust, in extreme case, escalating to suicide, due to their treatment by men. Also related to "internalize."

Self-control: related to men's lack of self-control in regard to their behavior on the street.

Silence: related to the failure of Egyptian women to speak out after being harassed. Silence is the typical reaction and the reaction that society expects and reinforces.

Speak out: related to women speaking out against sexual harassment, either in the streets or through the map.

Subverting: related to countering societal taboos related to sexuality and female appropriate. Also, other traditions such as marriage.

Taboo: some interlocutors believe that taboos associated with sexual harassment and victim-blaming result in the silence of women who have been sexually harassed.

Tension: related to sexual tension being a cause of harassment.

Typology or typologies: of harassers and forms of harassment.

Victim-blaming: related to the tendency to blame women for harassment.

Walk: many Egyptian women view obstacles to the simple act of walking in the streets as indicative of the overall status of their rights.