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**NAVAL  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**HIJABISTAS, MOSQUES AND FORCE: MUSLIM  
WOMEN'S SEARCH FOR SELF IN BRITAIN**

by

Christina L. Humphries

March 2011

Thesis Co-Advisors:

Scott Siegel  
Zachary Shore

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**HIJABISTAS, MOSQUES AND FORCE: MUSLIM WOMEN'S SEARCH FOR  
SELF IN BRITAIN**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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## **ABSTRACT**

Great Britain has struggled with how to treat its Muslim population since the terrorist attacks in 2005. Prime Minister David Cameron believes that British multiculturalism is not working, and the country needs to move to a more integrative approach for its diverse population. Muslim women in Britain, however, have already integrated. They have taken on British values of social and gender equality as their own. They seek to practice their religion as freely as men. They participate in the British market, and they demand the same rights as all other British citizens. They have found a hybrid identity that blends these values with Islam and have found a new, Western sense of self. These women prove that identity compromise and integration are possible in multicultural Britain.



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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ASC	Avon and Somerset Constabulary
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CLU	Community Liaison Unit
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
FCO	Foreign Commonwealth Office
FM	Forced Marriage
FMA	Forced Marriage Act
FMU	Forced Marriage Unit
HNH	Honour Network Hotline
LCM	Lancashire Council of Mosques
MCB	Muslim Council of Britain
MP	Member of Parliament
MPACUK	Muslim Public Affairs Council United Kingdom
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
PM	British Prime Minister
SBS	Southall Black Sisters
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Great Britain is a unique case in Europe as it deals with cultural integration. By allowing all subcultures in British society to act independently, multiculturalism does not take away individual freedoms at the expense of citizenship and has been praised for such inclusion. Although some critics of British multicultural policies say that Britain has gone too far and integration is not happening, it seems that at least one group is flourishing in the multicultural society- Muslim women. These women have been able to negotiate their identity between religious traditions and Western modernization. I believe this group has adopted British liberal democratic values.

Muslim integration is a hotly debated issue within the European Union. Although continental Europe seems to view Muslim integration as a threat to the status-quo and state security, multiculturalism has allowed Great Britain to thrive with a diverse society.<sup>1</sup> Multiculturalism is the concept that several different cultures can peacefully coexist within one country. The attacks in 2005 changed many British perspectives on multiculturalism, and many scholars began to believe that British policies promoting multiculturalism have not encouraged Muslim integration—at expense of British citizens’ lives—and blame the inclusive attitude on causing division within society.

However, it seems that British Muslim women are able to thrive in the multicultural environment despite what other subgroups may be experiencing. By participating openly in society, young British Muslim women are shattering stereotypes. Working and playing in the public sphere allows British Muslim women to portray a new image of who they are as a group, although it should be noted that one young Muslim woman cannot speak for all young Muslim women and vice versa. As a whole, young British Muslim women are taking on British values while maintaining aspects of tradition. Although Islam is viewed by the West as a highly patriarchal religion, British Muslim women are using the aspects of living in a modern society to give their tradition a new meaning. These women are the mothers of the next generation of British Muslims, and

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<sup>1</sup> Liz Fekete. “Anti-Muslim Racism and the European Security State,” *Race and Class* 46(2004), 3.

their attitudes will influence many more beyond their own ethnic or religious group. British Muslim women seem to negotiate the political and personal, creating a more modern (and moderate) sense of self and integrating into British society.

Young Muslim women in Britain have taken their religious culture into the mainstream Western society in which they live. Because Britain is accepting of change and diversity and promotes equality, Muslim women are given choices and voices. They are allowed to speak out about what matters to them and their community in an open forum. Muslim women are thus able to embrace their traditions, which are tied to their religion and culture, and embrace modernity, which is linked to British society. This thesis will explore a different angle on a highly debated topic that deals with multiculturalism, Islam, femininity and what it means to be British.

This topic raises issues within the overarching theme of Islam's place in Britain and Western Europe. Although many countries in Europe have passed laws that ban or partially ban religious dress based on principles of separation of church and state, Britain has not. Britain's unique multicultural lifestyle is one that embraces difference almost to a fault. However, there has been a recent call from British Prime Minister (PM) David Cameron recently declared "war" on multiculturalist tolerance, citing the sentiment that it was "fostering extremist ideology and directly contributing to home-grown Islamic terrorism."<sup>2</sup> I am interested to see if Muslim women are embracing the British liberal principles of their nation; I believe that British Muslim women have already embraced the liberal values of "equality, law and freedom of speech across all parts of society" that Cameron recently touted.<sup>3</sup> The presence of free, liberated young Muslim women can have a strong, positive effect on society. Due to women's unique position as mothers and wives who are able to influence their families, Muslim women have the potential to reshape and rethink what it means to be a British Muslim. British Muslim women have embraced British social democratic ideologies.

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<sup>2</sup> Oliver Wright and Jerome Taylor, "Cameron: My War On Multiculturalism," *Guardian (London)*, February 5, 2011. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/cameron-my-war-on-multiculturalism-2205074.html> (accessed March 3, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## A. BACKGROUND: MUSLIMS IN EUROPE

Interaction between the West and Islam has occurred since the inception of Islam.<sup>4</sup> Scholars have categorized Muslim immigration in Europe into four distinct periods. The first three periods of Muslim immigration in Europe mostly affected Southern and Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup> The fourth phase of Muslim immigration occurred in Western Europe in the twentieth century is divided into two waves of immigration (economic and political).<sup>6</sup>

After the end of colonization, “former subjects of the British Empire became ‘citizens of the Commonwealth.’”<sup>7</sup> This 1948 change in legislation allowed residents of former colonies to reside with full rights in Britain.<sup>8</sup> Muslims from the Indian subcontinent and Cyprus began a mass immigration in the late 1950s, with over 10,000 men entering Britain per year.<sup>9</sup> These immigrants were mostly men who were coming for purely economic reasons, to get higher-paying jobs to rebuild British cities after World War II, or to escape political disturbances in their own countries (as in the case of Cyprus).<sup>10</sup> The new workers were expected to do their jobs, send money home and subsequently return to their country of origin. Because these people lived in British colonies, their entry into Great Britain was unrestricted, which was good for the companies that hired labor.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Haifaa Jawad and Tansin Benn, *Muslim Women in the United Kingdom and Beyond: Experiences and Images* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), xix.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, xx. The first phase of Muslim immigration in Europe affected Sicily, Southern Italy and Spain in the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, respectively. The second phase had a wider influence; established initially in the European side of the former USSR, Muslims eventually spread to Finland, Poland and Ukraine. The third phase of Muslim immigration was a product of the spread of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. This is the first time Muslims were able to create an “indigenized presence” in Europe, as some of the native populations adopted Islam.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, xx–xxi.

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Allah in the West: Islamic Movements in America and Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 99.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> J. S. Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 39.

<sup>10</sup> Jawad and Benn, *Muslim Women in the United Kingdom and Beyond*, 2003, xxi and John Rex, “Islam in the United Kingdom” in Shirleen T. Hunter *Islam, Europe’s Second Religion* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 51.

<sup>11</sup> John Rex, “Islam in the United Kingdom” in Shirleen T. Hunter *Islam, Europe’s Second Religion* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003).

In response to the large scale migration, the British government passed the “Commonwealth Immigration Control Act,” which limited the amount of immigrants based on if they had a parent or grandparent already residing in Britain.<sup>12</sup> After this law was passed, the bulk of new immigrants in Britain came in to be unified with their fathers and grandfathers who were working as laborers in the undermanned British workforce.<sup>13</sup> This means that Muslim women’s immigration was intrinsically linked to male immigration, as this new policy brought a large portion of Muslim women and children into Britain. Nearly eighty percent of the 1 to 1.5 million British Muslims can trace their origins to Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India.<sup>14</sup> Of course, not all Muslims in Britain are from the Indian subcontinent. Political refugees poured in Europe from the Middle East and Eastern Europe since the late 1970s. Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan have been the main source of Muslims into Britain.<sup>15</sup> Also, there are indigenous British Muslims, who converted for marriage or personal choice.

As the Muslim communities grew in Britain, second and third generation British-born Muslims appeared with new issues and interests.<sup>16</sup> Young Muslims, ages 15–25 are an increasing portion of the Muslim population in the United Kingdom.<sup>17</sup> Although one would expect religious subcultures to get more secular as the group got more engrained into the secular British culture, this proves incorrect for British youth. Young British Muslims are routinely polled as more religious than their parents or grandparents.<sup>18</sup> They

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<sup>12</sup> The National Archives, “The Cabinet Papers 1915-1979: Commonwealth Immigration control and legislation.” <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/commonwealth-immigration-control-legislation.htm> (accessed September 20, 2010)

<sup>13</sup> John Rex, “Islam in the United Kingdom” in Shirleen T. Hunter *Islam, Europe’s Second Religion* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 51.

<sup>14</sup> Jawad and Benn, *Muslim Women in the United Kingdom and Beyond*, 2003, xxii.

<sup>15</sup> Jon Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim* (London: Continuum Press, 2007), 19 and Jawad and Benn, *Muslim Women in the United Kingdom and Beyond*, 2003, xxi. After fall of Iran’s Shah, the British Iranian population rose significantly (to 31,000 in 1991); the Iraqi population in Britain rose to 800,000 in the 1990s as a result of the first Gulf War.

<sup>16</sup> John Rex, “Islam in the United Kingdom” in Shirleen T. Hunter *Islam, Europe’s Second Religion* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 71.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim*, 2007, 20. One third of British Muslims are under fifteen years old, compared with twenty percent of the overall British population; only six percent of Muslims in Britain are over the age of 60, compared with twenty percent of the overall British population.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

are looking for more literal or pure interpretations of the Koran, not something that their elders have translated for them or their families have practiced for generations. This makes dealing with young Muslims very volatile. Not only do they seek out information on the Internet, but they believe the imams who serve their communities do not share the same convictions as the youth. Muslim youth are not attending mosque in high numbers, but they are more inclined than their predecessors to publicly assert Muslim values.<sup>19</sup> Muslim youth are searching for truth within Islam, but not looking to their religious leaders to provide them guidance. A recent study of 16–20-year old British Muslims with South Asian roots showed that the majority of participants “sought to interpret Islam as relevant to their lives outside home and ethno-religious enclave. There was a strong emphasis on being *British* Muslims.”<sup>20</sup>

The amount of data that young Muslims can find on the Internet in their religious quest is overwhelming and can sometimes preach defiance.<sup>21</sup> The version of defiant, corrupted Islam that youths find can turn them towards violence or at least further their sense of disenfranchisement by their secular culture. The problem seems to be in the fact that the imams are outdated and literally do not speak the same language as Muslim youth:

Despite the fact that many British young Muslims speak and think in English, there is not a well-worked out Qur’anic pedagogy in English. Thus, many of these young people are left either ignorant of this fundamental source of Islam or at the mercy of radical transnational Islamic groups, which try to indoctrinate them into a rigid ahistorical understand of Islam.<sup>22</sup>

The Islamic Centre for Policy Research asks “is there really a “unique ‘Muslim problem?’”<sup>23</sup> The universal youthful struggle of “who am I?” does not discriminate based

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<sup>19</sup> John Rex, “Islam in the United Kingdom” in Shirleen T. Hunter *Islam, Europe’s Second Religion* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 71

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim*, 2007, 43–44. Females were more likely to be exploratory, most likely as a “response to the greater control to which they were exposed at home.”

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Sahin quoted in Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim*, 2007, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Sughra Ahmed, *Seen and Not Heard: Voices of Young British Muslims*, (Leicestershire: Policy Research Centre, 2009), 23.

on religion, no matter how ingrained faith has been in a person's upbringing. However much they identify themselves with their Muslim heritage, British youth do see themselves as "integrated young people."<sup>24</sup>

How are British Muslim women negotiating between a traditional religion and a modern society? Have they integrated into British society?

## **B. MULTICULTURALISM AND PERCEIVED THREATS**

When the term 'multicultural' surfaced in the 1970s, the "initial policy focus was on schooling, both in terms of curriculum and as an institution." This meant that instead of forcing all immigrants to learn only English or study British wars, "mother-tongue" teaching, black history, Asian dress and...non-Christian religion and holidays" would be taught and accepted.<sup>25</sup> Multiculturalism allows multiple cultural identities in Britain without any integrative aspects of merging cultures. British multicultural policies promote separation of cultures and religion. Joanna Fomina believes that multicultural policies "violate the basic principles of democracy and equality, as well as abuse individual human rights in the name of the rights of cultural groups."<sup>26</sup> This claim has substance, as this thesis looks at how British Muslim women have been subjugated to being grouped into the "British Muslim" category instead of being categorized as women. Under the umbrella of multiculturalist policies, gender rights are overshadowed by religious rights, and women's needs often get cast aside during policy-making decisions. The multiculturalist British state "has done more than other European states to accommodate the claims of Muslim minorities," but has not changed the male-dominated Muslim culture within Britain to adapt to British values, especially gender equality.<sup>27</sup>

British women gained the right to vote in 1918 and continued to gain social rights throughout the twentieth century. The British liberal democracy considers matters

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<sup>24</sup> Ahmed, *Seen and Not Heard: Voices of Young British Muslims*, 2009), 22.

<sup>25</sup> Tariq Modood and Fauzia Ahmad, "British Muslim Perspectives On Multiculturalism," *Theory, Culture and Society* 24, no. 2 (2007): 188.

<sup>26</sup> Joanna Fomina, "The Failure of British Multiculturalism: Lessons For Europe," *Polish Sociological Review* 4 (2006): 409.

<sup>27</sup> Christian Joppke, "Limits of Integration Policy: Britain and Her Muslims," *Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009): 453.

relevant to women's issues, and takes gender into consideration when developing policy. Liberal democracies, such as Britain, have been instrumental in shaping the workplace to allow equal opportunity for women, and in turn have shaped the British family, who had to adapt women working outside of the home.<sup>28</sup> British women also have access to socialized healthcare, and family-planning services are provided. Although Britain has a male-breadwinner based market that does not reward women for working, it does provide many opportunities for women to succeed.<sup>29</sup> Liberal democracies, such as Britain, promote gender equality in and out of the home. The United Kingdom's Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 and the European Union's Equal Treatment Directive of 1976 were enacted to ensure that British (and other European) women receive equal pay for equal work. These are some of the founding principles for gender equality in Britain, a value that liberal democracies do not take lightly.

In the case of British Muslim women, the state seems to have conflicting values. First, it values multiculturalism, and allows many subcultures to co-exist without any integrative aspects. Conversely, it values women's rights, which, in the case of traditional Muslim culture, are limited. This is why many British politicians view multiculturalism as a threat to Britain; it does not require the immigrant/nonnative British person to adopt the liberal democratic values of Britain. So British Muslim women are caught between the culture they are born into, which practices traditional gender roles, and British society, whose laws tell them women are equal to men.

Each case in this thesis is an example of how women are changing their culture in a society where liberal gender norms are dominant. The hijab is viewed as a threat by some Britons, who see it as a visible symbol of difference. However, hijabis in Britain have adapted the hijab to British styles and Western lifestyles. The hijab is no longer a symbol of difference, but a way to maintain piety in a modern world. The new range of

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<sup>28</sup> Julia Sila O'Connor, Ann Shola Orloff and Sheila Shaver, *States, Markets, Families: Gender, Liberalism, and Social Policy in Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1999), 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.



hijabs coming out of Britain, from hip-hop inspired designs to headscarves to wear with a police uniform, are examples of how British Muslim women have adapted the hijab to modern norms.

Forced marriage is viewed as a threat in British culture because it removes any aspect of consent from the marriage process, a valued norm in Western society. This practice threatens the livelihood of the British Muslim and Sikh victims of this crime. Women who live in Britain expect to be treated as any other British citizen when it comes to choice of marriage partner, and the British government has developed policies to ensure equality in treatment of forced marriage. British Muslim and Sikh women are working with the government to eliminate this practice, and use the British laws to change the British South Asian culture to match that of Britain. By educating and supporting women (and men) on the hazards of forced marriage, British South Asian women have started a shift in attitudes towards forced marriage in Britain, and strive to eliminate the practice that has no basis in religion.

Nonintegrated mosques are a perceived threat to British values because they are seen as “‘insecure’ (terrorist) sites in the United Kingdom (UK)” by the government.<sup>30</sup> The British government “has firmly intruded into the space of mosque reform and the debate on women’s participation in the name of counter-terrorism,” because it believes that women can promote a more moderate form of Islam, and that women’s presence in mosques will eradicate radical behavior. However, British Muslim women want access to the mosque so they can pray and participate in a community setting. They want the same opportunities in the religious sphere afforded to their male counterparts. The British value of gender equality is engrained in British Muslim women’s way of thought, and they are changing their Muslim culture to accept this value, as well.

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<sup>30</sup> Katherine Brown, “The Promise and Perils of Women’s Participation in UK Mosques: The Impact of Securitisation Agendas On Identity, Gender and Community,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 10, no. 3 (August 2008): 472.  
<http://web.ebscohost.com.libproxy.nps.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?hid=10&sid=4a19569a-d5e1-4f41-867c-744291155db8%40sessionmgr14&vid=2> (accessed February 22, 2011).

### **C. METHODOLOGY AND ROADMAP**

My thesis is a single case study of British Muslim women to show how they have transformed their identities to a combine both the traditional and modern aspects of religion and culture through three main outlets (cases). Because British policies have left room for self-identity for its citizens, Muslim women have successfully been able to negotiate their Muslim identity with their British identity. Great Britain also represents a critical case, because of its multicultural society.

My thesis will test to see how British society allows a minority (both religious- and gender-based) to flourish and successfully negotiate her identity. I will use peer-reviewed journals and books regarding each flashpoint to explain why this is a unique policy that allows Muslim women to express themselves. Each case will determine if, how and why women are successfully integrating into British society. This case study will point out three critical examples which have affected Muslim women in society: British Muslim fashion; the question of forced marriage; the evolving role of women in British mosques.

Chapter II will discuss the role of the hijab in Britain. This discussion will highlight the ways in which British Muslim women have transformed the meaning of the hijab. The chapter begins with a brief explanation of the different meanings of head coverings, both religious and cultural. By discussing implications of a consumer-driven culture such as Britain, the thesis will explain how and why British Muslim women are integrating their style with that of their non-veil wearing peers. This chapter will also discuss the struggle for religious wear in the public sphere. It is important to understand what rights British Muslim women fight for in reference to their religious convictions, as this provides insight into what makes up a British Muslim woman. Although other factors may drive the refashioning of the hijab (both in the commercial and public spheres), the British Muslim woman's desire to integrate into a consumer-based, secular society is the main reason this change occurs.

Chapter III will discuss the fight against forced marriage in Britain by British Asian women. This chapter refers to "South Asian" versus "Muslim;" it is important to

note that this problem (in Britain) mainly stems from South Asian immigrants, a large majority of whom are Muslim.<sup>31</sup> The problem also strongly affects the British Sikh community. This chapter will begin with a detailed description and comparison of forced and arranged marriage. Next, the chapter will discuss British Asian women who have affected government policy through their efforts and what the new policies against forced marriage in Britain are. This chapter will also discuss the transformation from multiculturalism to integration in Britain and how that has affected the discussion of forced marriage. Chapter III finds that British Asian women wish to have the same rights as their non-Asian counterparts. Their fight against forced marriage shows that, by using the court system, changing laws and influencing policy, British Asian women are successfully integrating themselves into British society.

Chapter IV will discuss British Muslim women's struggle for a place in the mosque. As one of the cornerstones of any major religion, the place of worship plays a significant role in the life of a believer, and exclusion from that place can lead to a sense of disenfranchisement. The British Muslim women who fight for a space to pray in the British mosque do so with democratic tactics and ideals. Their ability to mobilize and peacefully discuss their demands breaks down the gender stereotypes that still exist in many British mosques.

Chapter V will conclude with a brief thesis summary as well as future research possibilities. This thesis will conclude with the point that British Muslim (and Sikh, in the case of forced marriage), are integrating themselves well into the British liberal democracy. They are active participants in society and push for improvement in many aspects of their lives. Their integration is key to the Muslim population in Britain; women's roles as mothers, daughters and wives are important and influential. If women are well-integrated, it seems that men would naturally follow. Thus, as attitudes toward and of women change, a religion tarnished by scourge of violence and misogyny will be normalized and incorporated into everyday life in a liberal democracy.

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<sup>31</sup> Marianne Hester et al. for the British Home Office, "Forced Marriage: The Risk Factors and the Effect of Raising the Minimum Age For a Sponsor, and of Leave to Enter the UK as a Spouse or Fiancé (e)," August 2007: 24.

## II. HIJABISTAS

How are Muslim women framing their identities through the hijab and other religious clothing in Britain? Does this show integrationist or multiculturalist tendencies? Does religious wear have a place in a secular liberal democracy? This chapter seeks to explain how young British Muslim women are negotiating their identities between traditional expectations and modern culture through the image of the veil. Looking at women's clothing tells us about who they are, what they identify as and how they want to be seen; by looking at the marketing of Muslim women's clothing in Britain, we can discover how they are negotiating their identities with Western expectations. Outward trappings allow women to express their identities. By adding Western elements to traditional Muslim wear, Muslim women in Britain are defying expectations of what they "should" be. Two aspects of identity are fused in one element—the hijab. This chapter will explain how Muslim women in Britain are forging their identities through clothing. It will further postulate that this phenomenon occurs because British Muslim women are well integrated into mainstream society.

### A. INTRODUCTION

Why can't we take advantage of both cultures, fuse them together, and create something different which is us after all? It's our identity. It's who we are.<sup>32</sup>

The hijab is a religious symbol of piety for Muslim women. However, its visibility has many Britons concerned that Muslim women are being subjugated, abused or are under the thumb of Muslim men. These concerns directly reflect the British principle of gender equality. Recently, the hijab and other forms of outward religious expression have been up for debate, especially in the West.<sup>33</sup> Emma Tarlo, who studies women's dress in reference to culture and religion, writes about the "Orientalist" images

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<sup>32</sup> Emma Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2010), 198.

<sup>33</sup> In this paper hijab, headscarf and veil will all be used interchangeably to reference the head covering that Muslim women wear to cover hair and neck. The niqab, which covers the face except for the eyes, the burqa, the abaya and the jilbab will be discussed using the specific terms.

that represent a historical Western look at the veil. She believes these images describe the women who wear the veil as “passive, exotic, oppressed and sensually alluring figures,” yet full of dichotomous images of “secrecy, mystery, piety, holiness, freedom.”<sup>34</sup> Pnina Werbner believes that Islamic dress has come “to be a symbolically laden vehicle which may stand alternatively for modesty, a defiant, oppositional ‘Islam’ or a rejection of ‘tradition.’”<sup>35</sup> Tarlo also believes that women who veil in the West can be seen as “victims in foreign lands in need of rescue through the supposed civilizing influence of the West or as migrants from foreign lands, who, by stubbornly retaining their alien and backward ways, seem to threaten the very notions of individuality and freedom on which contemporary democratic Western societies are founded.”<sup>36</sup>

This view has been echoed by the non-Muslim British population; in a 2009 Gallup poll, only thirty-six percent of non-Muslim British believe that Muslims living in Britain are loyal to the country in which they reside (whereas eighty-two percent of British Muslims believe that their religious group as a whole is loyal to Britain).<sup>37</sup> The hijab and other Islamic wear are outward expressions of faith, which can be seen as not fitting in to a secular state. Racialized discourses of what a Muslim woman is tend to pit Islam against the West, and use the woman as the “embodiment of a repressive and fundamentalist religion.”<sup>38</sup> Many critics of the hijab say that it is a tool of oppression and control by men and is the symbol of what is wrong with Islam. “For secular feminists,

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<sup>34</sup> Emma Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2010), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Pnina Werbner, “Veiled Interventions in Pure Space: Honour, Shame and Embodied Struggles Among Muslims in Britain and France,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 24, no. 2 (March 2007): 163.

<sup>36</sup> Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith*, 2010, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Adam Sitte, “U.S., Canada Show More Interfaith Cohesion Than Europe,” Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/118273/canada-show-interfaith-cohesion-europe.aspx> (accessed December 9, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> Claire Dwyer, *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2005), 53, <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=GfIodZRfmh8C&oi=fnd&pg=RA1-PA50&dq=modern+british+muslim+women&ots=AtKHBmhlMh&sig=OafRHhLSploKVDmDmPY3J0dJcVM#v=onepage&q=modern%20british%20muslim%20women&f=false> (accessed December 10, 2010).

hijab represents women's oppression: it is a patriarchal mandate that denies women the right to control their bodies and to choose what to wear.”<sup>39</sup>

Muslim dress is becoming a frame for the larger debate surrounding multiculturalism and its perceived failures seemingly due to a lack of assimilation by Muslim immigrants. The niqab and other women’s Islamic wear have been seen as a slap in the face of British society; by not emulating British dress, Muslim women are seen as ungrateful to their British hosts.<sup>40</sup> “Veiled women are considered to be ungrateful subjects who have failed to assimilate to are deemed to threaten the ‘British’ way of life.”<sup>41</sup> As many as eighty percent of newspaper stories dealing with British Muslims from 2000–2008 “associate them with threats, problems or opposition to dominant British values,” Muslim women who cover are viewed as “alien and different.”<sup>42</sup> This media-controlled image of a British Muslim woman frames her as someone who is not British (because she does not look like ‘us’) and someone who is either a victim “not in control of her own choices,” or on the opposite end of the spectrum, outwardly political.<sup>43</sup> These media images of British Muslim women misrepresent (and under-represent) an entire subset of people. The problem is, this image is not reality, yet it is what most Britons see in reference to Muslim women. British Hijabis, women who veil by choice, view the veil as a way to get closer to their religion and beliefs in a secular country. These opposing views are reconciled by modern hijabis, who take on Western/British aspects of design and style in their traditional garments.

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<sup>39</sup> Ziba Mir-Hosseini, “The Politics and Hermeneutics of Hijab in Iran: From Confinement to Choice,” *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 4, no. 1 (2007): abstract, <http://www.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1114&context=mwjhr> (accessed March 3, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> , Sevgi Kilic, “The British Veil Wars,” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 15, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 450.

<sup>41</sup> Gholam Khiabany and Milly Williamson, “Veiled Bodies-- Naked Racism: Culture, Politics and Race in the Sun,” *Race and Class* 50, no. 2 (October 2008): 69-88.

<sup>42</sup> Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith*, 2010), 9-10.; Kerry Moore, Paul Mason and Justin Lewis, *Images of Islam in the UK: The Representation of British Muslims in the British National Print News Media 2000-2008* (Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, 2008), 11.

<sup>43</sup> Nasar Meer, Claire Dwyer and Tariq Modood, “Embodying Nationhood?: Conceptions of British National Identity, Citizenship and Gender in the ‘veil Affair’,” *The Sociological Review* 58, no. 1 (2010): 89.

Most written accounts by women in Britain are women who veil by choice and are not forced to don the religious wear. Through my research, I have discovered that young British Muslim women are successfully negotiating between religious and cultural traditions and British modernity using the hijab to form their own identities. They have taken control of their identities through fashion design and retail, the capitalistic approach to religion. They have used democratic principles in their favor to block attempts to ban Islamic religious wear from public spaces. British Muslim women have embraced British culture and democratic principles through the frame of the veil. Although it may seem like a garment that distinguishes them from non-Muslims, it actually allows them to enter spaces in which they may not feel comfortable if uncovered, allowing visibility and participation in society, an important aspect of a participatory democracy.

### **1. Islamic Background of the Hijab**

Clothing religious and traditional- culture and religion overlap sometimes, but not always?

It is important to put the hijab in Britain in context before the discussion of how the hijab is used to negotiate identity is raised. Muslim women have covered since the beginning of Islam, when Mohammed was told to have his wives and daughters cover so they would be recognized as honorable, religious women and not harassed by other men.<sup>44</sup> Another part of the Quran says to “let [women] wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments” except to their family.<sup>45</sup> The interpretations of these passages have prompted covering, using everything from modest, non-revealing Western clothing, to the extreme covering of the burka, which is a cloth

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<sup>44</sup> Aya 59 from Sura al-Ahzab; O Prophet! Tell Thy wives And daughters, and the Believing women, that They should cast their Outer garments over Their Persons (when outside): That they should be known (As such) and not Molested. Ibrahim Syed, “Women in Islam: Hijab,” Islam for Today, <http://www.islamfortoday.com/syed01.htm> (accessed December 6, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers’ sons, or their sisters’ sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants not having need (of women), or the children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women; and let them not strike their feet so that what they hide of their ornaments may be known; and turn to Allah all of you, O believers! so that you may be successful. Qu’ran, 24:31 (Muhsin Khan)

that covers the whole body of a woman, and has a mesh area for her eyes so she can see. The choice of cover depends on the country of origin of the wearer; each culture has its own interpretation of this passage.



Figure 1. Hijab.<sup>46</sup>



Figure 2. The Niqab and Burka.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> From British Broadcasting Channel, "Sarkozy Orders Bill On Banning Full Islamic Veils," BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8635178.stm> (accessed December 5, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> From British Broadcasting Channel, "Sarkozy Orders Bill On Banning Full Islamic Veils," BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8635178.stm> (accessed December 5, 2010).



## 2. British Hijab History

Muslim immigrants did not necessarily wear the hijab when they arrived in Britain but based their garments on the culture they came from instead of their religion. Most Pakistani women wore the dupatta, a light chiffon scarf, which was worn loosely around their necks and raised to cover their heads “in front of select older male relatives, strangers or when praying” though not generally in public.<sup>48</sup> Other Pakistani women wore the chador, which is “a very large shawl which is draped around the head the head and upper part of the body.”<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Bangladeshi women who arrived to join their husbands and fathers in Britain in the mid-twentieth century wore saris, not headscarves.<sup>50</sup> These styles of dress were associated with the respective cultures, not Islam. Because the bulk of these immigrants were Muslim, Pakistani and Bengali clothing became associated with religion *and* culture, as religion and culture have become enmeshed beyond distinction from one another; thus the hijab became an “essentialized symbol of a ‘traditional’ identity” associated with Muslims or South Asians.<sup>51</sup> This does not mean that South Asians and Muslims automatically accept the hijab as a part of their identity. In fact, many British Muslim women choose to not cover. The expectations within British society have thrust the veiled identity upon them.

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<sup>48</sup> Pnina Werbner, “Veiled Interventions in Pure Space: Honour, Shame and Embodied Struggles Among Muslims in Britain and France,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 24, no. 2 (March 2007): 166.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Harris, “Culture of Bangladesh,” *Countries and their Cultures*, <http://www.everyculture.com/A-Bo/Bangladesh.html> (accessed December 5, 2010).

<sup>51</sup> Werbner, “Veiled Interventions-in Pure Space,” 2007, 172.



Figure 3. Hindi actress Noor Jehan wears the dupatta in the 1955 film “Dupatta.”<sup>52</sup>

As the meaning of hijab continues to morph and develop throughout the world, it is clear that British Muslim women are struggling with the identity that it associates them with. The Islamic concept of the ummah- or entire Muslim population- hypothetically allows a Muslim woman to feel at home with other Muslims in any setting, as religion knows no borders or nation. Wearing the hijab associates women with birthplace of Islam and Arabic, the Middle East, shifting identity away from South Asian and toward the universality of Islam.<sup>53</sup> Young women are wearing veils in Great Britain as a sign that they are visibly Muslim, a global citizen, as well as British.

## **B. THE CAPITALIST HIJABI**

Some hijabis or hijabistas (a hijabi fashionista), women who wear the hijab by choice, have used their religious beliefs to make a profit. “The practice of veiling is inseparable from consumption, commodity... and is stimulated by global and local trends

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<sup>52</sup> Varghese Varghese, “Dupatta [1955] Noor Jehan,” OLD GOLD OF HINDI FILMI SONGS, entry posted April 12, 2010, <http://goldiesofhindifilmisongs.blogspot.com/2010/04/dupatta-1955-noor-jehan.html> (accessed December 5, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> Werbner, “Veiled Interventions in Pure Space,” 2007,172.

of the market economy.”<sup>54</sup> Because veils must be bought and sold, hijabis are intrinsically part of consumer culture, and are therefore defining their identities through their pocketbook.

How women spend their pounds can provide an insight into their value system. With over 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide, it has been estimated that \$96 billion in revenue could be each year made by retailers if even fifty percent of Muslims spent \$120 on Islamic attire.<sup>55</sup> The styles of Saudi Arabian sisters, who wear the traditional formal black abaya, do not appeal to all Muslim women who cover. The British hijabistas have found a way to negotiate their identities while tapping into a new market of consumers. They are using an aspect of British culture, capitalism, to create a new, hybrid culture. By providing modern options that are laced with Western-style fashion, British Muslim designers are allowing women to negotiate between the traditional expectations of pious, conservative dressing and Western ideals of beauty and fashion. These women embrace the capitalistic social democracy and use it to thrive, which suggests that they are well integrated into society.

### **1. Tapping Into a Western Market for Traditional Clothing**

Living in a modern Western world, British Muslim women yearned for hijab that would link them to their religious beliefs, yet showcase their individual fashion sense. Britain is the “most individualistic” country. The textures, prints, colors and designs offered on [thehijabshop.com](http://thehijabshop.com) showcases a fashionably modern take on a traditional garment. The most popular hijab website in Great Britain carries affordable headscarves

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<sup>54</sup> Baris Kilicbay and Mutlu Binark, “Consumer Culture, Islam and the Politics of Lifestyle: Fashion For Veiling in Contemporary Turkey,” *European Journal of Communication* 17, no. 4 (December 2002): 495–511.

<sup>55</sup> Henry Meyer and Heidi Couch, “Harrods Sees Profit from Islamic Fashion as Qatar Takes Control,” *Bloomberg*, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-07-12/harrods-sees-profits-in-islamic-fashion-as-qatari-owners-showcase-abayas.html> (accessed December 1, 2010).

and has spawned many more British-based sites that cater to a worldwide Muslim clientele.<sup>56</sup> This desire for individualism through clothing is therefore a British value, which has been absorbed by British Muslim women.

The philosophy behind Wahid Rahman's Web-based business is part financial, part religious. Clearly he opened his website to make money (and has since opened follow-on sites geared towards a modern Muslim audience), but he seems to truly believe that young Muslim women needed a unique outlet to express their religious identity whilst participating in British culture. A son of Muslim Bengali immigrants, Rahman views his generation as searching for identity that sets them apart from their parents, yet connects them with the Muslim world:

This is a generation who have seen their mothers and people back home being subservient to men, not speaking to their husbands, spending almost all the time in the kitchen cooking and so on. But they themselves have been brought up in the West. They see the freedoms Western women have and they look at their parents and think, No, that's not right. But they don't want to just copy Western ways in everything either. Then they look to Islam and they find that it's all there- women's rights, husbands having to respect their wives etc. So they are keen to push the Islamic side of things, rather than the cultural side, otherwise they will be digging their own graves, so to speak. The Islamic side is more liberating.<sup>57</sup>

Rahman began the site after many years of his sisters complaining that they could not get stylish Muslim garments in Britain, as many of the stores catered to an older generation of Muslim women. Although the idea originally started with the jilbab, he moved on to the hijab quickly after realizing it was cheaper and simpler to get a hold of.<sup>58</sup> Because the hijab is one-size-fits-all, Rahman could offer many colors, patterns and textures of hijab without having to get multiple sizes. This made it easy for him to provide covering options for a large number of Muslim women worldwide in a short

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<sup>56</sup> Wahid Rahman, "The Hijab Shop," The Hijab Shop, <http://www.thehijabshop.com/capsters/index.php> (accessed November 1, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim*, 2010, 172.

<sup>58</sup> The modern jilbab is loose-fitting and covers the entire body except for the hands, face and head.

amount of time.<sup>59</sup> By bringing fashionable Muslim garments to the public, Rahman unknowingly opened the door for many Muslim women designers in Britain. He also spread capitalistic British values.

Rahman's website also offers Muslim women an opportunity to participate in one of the most modern things a woman can do: play sports. Dutch designer Cindy Van Den Breman's Capsters are "a modern-day sports hijab."<sup>60</sup> Created from synthetic materials used for traditional sportswear, Capsters allow Muslim women to safely participate in the same activities as their hijab-free counterparts without sacrificing modesty. Some of her designs include hijabs for tennis, skating and outdoor sports.<sup>61</sup> Van Den Breman's designs enable women to challenge the stereotype of what some people think a Muslim woman should participate in, and gives them the opportunity to express themselves through physical activities. This is an important aspect of the way young Muslim women are able to negotiate their identities through fashion. They are no longer limited by bulky headgear that restricts them from having active lifestyles. Instead, the invention of Capsters promotes women's participation in sports, regardless of her choice to wear the hijab. Invented in 1999 as part of van den Breman's graduation project from Design Academy Eindhoven, Capsters preceded the growingly popular burqini and hijood sportswear, designed by Australian Muslim Aheda Zanetti, effectively creating the first sports hijab.<sup>62</sup> This invention has allowed British Muslim women to participate in Western cultural activities (sports) while maintaining her piety. The fact that this garment is popular strongly suggests that Muslim women have absorbed British lifestyles and values without losing their religion. Although Rahman is male and van den Breman is Dutch, both people wanted to create something as a result of the plight of British (and other Western) Muslim women who find themselves caught between the traditional and

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<sup>59</sup> Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim*, 2010, 169–172.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>61</sup> Wahid Rahman, "Sporting Hijabs," The Hijab Shop, <http://www.thehijabshop.com/capsters/index.php> (accessed November 1, 2010).

<sup>62</sup> "Cindy Van Den Breman, "Background," Capsters, <https://www.capsters.com/background.jsp> (accessed November 1, 2010).

modern. Their diversity (from the rest of the British Muslim women designers) and success proves that accepting British democracy and values allow minorities to thrive and redefine self.

## 2. Fashioning the Jilbab

Thehijabshop.com has inspired many retailers like it. Amirahfashions.co.uk is one such site that was created by a young British Muslim woman who started out designing her own jilbabs. A long, loose robe with long sleeves, a jilbab hardly sounds like a fashionable garment to most young women who live in Britain, where sleeveless dresses and hot pants from Kate Moss' collections at Top Shop are best-sellers.<sup>63</sup> This is why a British Muslim woman, Zainab Amirah, who wore the jilbab, wanted to create styles of the garment that resonated with her generation in Britain. Reverting to Islam at the age of sixteen, she had "to find something out there I'd actually *want* to wear. Bearing in mind this was 10 years ago, there was no choice like there is now. Being a Fashion & textile student I just started to create my own jilbabs in my own style."<sup>64</sup> Like a number of designers like her, Zainab got jilbabs inquiries for her designs from friends, and eventually began producing the garments for profit. She was able to create clothing for a broader Muslim audience, which allowed them to wear traditional garments in modern prints, fabrics and designs.

While discovering her faith, Sadia Nosheen of Masoomah also began designing jilbabs that "were Islamic but also comfortable and fitting for a young Muslimah in a university/working atmosphere."<sup>65</sup> Creating an outfit that would allow Nosheen to show her Muslim identity for a working environment allows her to break away from

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<sup>63</sup> Topshop, "Kate Moss: Topshop," Topshop, <http://www.topshop.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/CatalogNavigationSearchResultCmd?catalogId=33057&storeId=12556&langId=-1&viewAllFlag=false&categoryId=235997&interstitial=true&TS=1288613906999> (accessed December 9, 2010).

<sup>64</sup> Jana Kossiabati, "Hijab Style Exclusive: Amairah Fashion Interview and Giveaway," Hijab Style UK, April 28, 2010, <http://www.hijabstyle.co.uk/2010/04/hijab-style-exclusive-amirah-fashions.html> (accessed November 1, 2010); Adopting the Islamic faith is referred to as "reverting" vice "converting," symbolizing to the believers that becoming Muslim is to return to the original religion.

<sup>65</sup> Jana Kossiabati, "Hijab Style Exclusive: Masoomah Interview," Hijab Style UK, March 1, 2010 <http://www.hijabstyle.co.uk/2010/03/hijab-style-exclusive-masoomah.html> (accessed November 1, 2010).

stereotypes of the place of Muslim woman, thus negotiating her identity between traditional and modern. She embraces the society that encourages difference through her work, while simultaneously paying tribute to her traditional religion, thus proving that she has accepted diversity and equality that are imbued in British democracy.

### **3. The Hijab Gets a Makeover**

Another young British Muslim woman, Amena, also began creating her own hijabs, which are uniquely termed “hoojab” because of the fact that it is sewn like a hood (of a jacket or sweatshirt), yet is worn and covers like a traditional hijab. “The whole point of the hood is to make the scarf-wearing easier... this eliminates the need for using many pins and such to keep the scarf in place.”<sup>66</sup> Amena even gives online video tutorials on her YouTube channel Amenakin to Muslim women on how to wear the hoojab and traditional hijabs for different occasions and seasons. Just as women who do not cover yearn for the right hairstyle for special occasions, Amena shows Muslim women the right hijab style for weddings and warm summer days, always promoting her retail site, [www.pearl-daisy.com](http://www.pearl-daisy.com), below the video. Amena even offers tutorials for professional women who must wear stethoscopes and ladies who wish to don earrings, luxuries rarely afforded to women who veil. With this type of tutorial, she is allowing women to display both their profession and religion. With the use of multimedia (both Internet and video), Amena has changed the way Muslim women in Britain and even possibly the world, interact with their traditional religious clothing. She uses modern technology to display a traditional garment. Whereas this may sound like a contradiction, it proves that Amena has embraced freedom of expression and freedom of religion, two values of British democracy.

### **4. Appealing to a Broader Market**

Hana Tajima-Simpson is another up-and-coming Muslim designer who launched her line “Maysaa” in early 2010. After reverting to Islam in 2005,

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<sup>66</sup> “Hoojab: What is a Hoojab?” Video clip, February 14, 2010, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwXIF1TtawQ), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwXIF1TtawQ> (accessed November 3, 2010).

Tajima-Simpson felt that there were not any styles available that represented her as a hijabi; her personality and faith were not adequately expressed through traditional Muslim styles, so she began designing her own clothes. Like many other designers, once her friends saw her clothes, they asked her to make some for them.

Tajima-Simpson wants all women to wear her clothing, regardless of religious affiliation. “My designs are not targeted at Muslims alone,” said Tajima-Simpson, regarding her long dresses, flowing slacks and long sleeve tops.<sup>67</sup> She recognizes that women want trendy, yet modest, designs whether they are religious or not. She puts a conservative spin on modern fashions in order to provide viable options to women who are looking to show less skin. “When boundaries are blurred... it takes away limits in design,” the Japanese/British/Muslim Tajima-Simpson says of her multicultural upbringing.<sup>68</sup> Her line is a big hit in the UK, and even offers shipping to over 100 countries, and free shipping to seven countries, including Indonesia and the U.S., where her designs are popular.<sup>69</sup> Tajima-Simpson has not only negotiated her identity as a British Muslim, but she is also helping other Muslim women worldwide negotiate their identities through her fashions. She allows women the opportunity to dress conservatively in a modern society, while giving them the freedom to look “Western.”

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<sup>67</sup> Shaimaa Khalil, “Muslim Designers Mix the Hijab with Latest Fashions,” BBC News, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10105062> (accessed November 14, 2010).

<sup>68</sup> Hana Tajima-Simpson, “About Us,” <http://www.maysaa.com/about-maysaa>, <http://www.maysaa.com/about-maysaa> (accessed October 29, 2010).

<sup>69</sup> Hana Tajima-Simpson, “UK Delivery,” <http://www.maysaa.com/about-maysaa>, <http://www.maysaa.com/about-maysaa> (accessed October 29, 2010).





Figure 4. A range of styles offered by Hana Tajima-Simpson in her “Maysaa” line.<sup>70</sup>

Sarah Elenany has gone a different route with her Muslim fashions. Although her designs look like high-end Western fashions, her sporty clothing lines feature Islamic art, such as the “Dua,” “Minarets” and “Brotherhood” both on the inside and outside of the garment.<sup>71</sup> “My label is a celebration of Islamic culture and art and it’s not apologetic. It says this is it, this is us. I wanted to design prints and clothes that Muslims could look at and instantly identify with,” says Elenany.<sup>72</sup> By using traditional Islamic symbols interpreted in a modern way, Elenany has tapped into the market of the edgy young Muslimah, who likes to dress with a harder edge than what some of the other British designers are creating. By making modest dressing more attractive to women with a street style, she seems to have found her niche in street Muslim women’s fashion, much as Baby Phat found its way into street Western women’s fashion.

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<sup>70</sup> Mariame Tighanimine and Khadija Tighanimine, “And the Winner Is...,” *Hijab and the City*, <http://www.hijabandthecity.com/2010/06/and-the-winner-is/> (accessed October 29, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Elenany, “Graphics,” Elenany, <http://www.elenany.co.uk/page/graphics> (accessed November 4, 2010).

<sup>72</sup> Shaimaa Khalil, “Muslim designers mix the hijab with latest fashions,” *BBC News: Entertainment and Arts*, May 14, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10105062>, (accessed November 7, 2010).

Elenany's beginnings as a designer, like many other British Muslim designers, came as a result of her own plight to find conservative clothing that fit her sense of style. She found that British stores and the Internet offered "nothing I liked that covered me up properly and had street cred."<sup>73</sup> She used her background as a British Muslim to create a totally different style than was offered at the time and came up with her "Elenany." By moving away from the expected looks (jilbab, abaya, hijab), Elenany created a unique line that was appropriate for Muslims and cool enough to be worn by non-Muslims (half of Elenany's sales are to non-Muslims).<sup>74</sup> She is proud that her brand is "very British" and she is proud to be "young and Muslim;" she serves as a primary example of how British Muslim women have negotiated their identity through fashion and belief. Her designs give Muslim women clothing options that allow them to explore their modern and traditional sides in a new way. "I think Muslims in Britain today feel they have to keep apologising because other Muslims do bad stuff," Elenany explains. "But I wanted it to be a celebration. To say, yes, we're angsty - but really it's all right."<sup>75</sup>

Like Elenany, other British Muslim designers are not apologetic for being Muslim or being female. They are using their designs to reach out to other young Muslims, who are most likely to look for styles that represent who they are, and are looking for something outside of the traditional Arab/South Asian styles of dress.

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<sup>73</sup> Terry Ramsey, "Modesty blazes a fashion trail," *The National*, updated August 1, 2009, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/modesty-blazes-a-fashion-trail?pageCount=1> accessed November 7, 2010.

<sup>74</sup> Jerome Taylor, "Beautiful and Islamic: the new look on the catwalk; Jerome Taylor witnesses a fusion of fashion with traditional Muslim dress," *The Independent*, July 2, 2010, News Section.

<sup>75</sup> Ramsey, "Modesty blazes a fashion trail," 2009.



Figure 5. (Left) Elenany's Minaret Winter Coat and (Right) Brotherhood Hoody Dress.<sup>76</sup>

Although the conservative styles produced by Amirah, Elenany, Tajima-Simpson, and Amena vary greatly, these women share a common bond. Tired of wearing traditional Muslim clothing or strategically fashioning Western clothing into appropriate attire, these women took initiative to launch their own styles, which seem widely accepted by both Muslim and non-Muslim women within and outside of Britain. The arrival of the “Capitalist Hijabi,” a woman who makes money designing and selling Muslim clothing, has created a new identity possibility for Muslim women in Britain. By not buying a garment made/designed in the South Asia and the Middle East, where so many Muslim garments come from, Muslim women are using the power of the dollar to show that modernity and tradition can coexist in the form of fashion. The fact that British Muslim wear Islamic garments that go with trendy Western styles shows that they have embraced their Western lifestyles and options without giving up their religious

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<sup>76</sup> From Sarah Elenany, “The Friday Collection,” Elenany, <http://www.elenany.co.uk/pcat/friday> (accessed November 5, 2010).

beliefs. By offering options of wear, fabrics and styles, Muslim women in Britain have opened the door to a land of style that many Muslim women previously felt they did not belong. The new styles and wears of these garments allow Muslim women to engage in activities that they previously shunned for covering purposes.

## **5. Profiting and Giving**

The featured British Muslim designers are not just in business for profit. Aside from wanting to create more fashionable styles for Muslim women who cover, the Capitalist Hijabis use ethics as a selling point for their clothing. It may persuade hijabis to buy from a Muslim site or store versus purchasing apparel from a mass retailer.

Elenany sells her products exclusively on her site, as she feels that Muslims should not have to buy from businesses that do not reflect good ethical practices or donate profits to things that Muslims do not believe in (she was not specific as to what these would be). She promises that the people who make her clothes work in a “comfortable” environment and receive “fair” wages.<sup>77</sup> She believes this is important to her fellow Muslims, as well.

Tajima-Simpson also advertises that her workers earn fair wages and work in good conditions. She also promotes the Muslim requirement of alms giving (called zakat for Sunni and khums for Shi’a) by donating ten percent of her Maysaa proceeds to Children’s Hope and Made AFRICA.<sup>78</sup> Neither organization claims affiliation with Islam, nor promotes Islam on their websites, which makes them an interesting choice for Tajima-Simpson. Perhaps her choice of charities is also a compromise between the religious expectations of alms-giving and secular causes.

Even Capsters designer van den Breeman is affiliated with “the leading global organization that empowers girls and women through sports,” Women Win.<sup>79</sup> This is

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<sup>77</sup> Sarah Elenany, “About Us,” Elenany, <http://www.elenany.co.uk/page/about> (accessed November 5, 2010).

<sup>78</sup> One of the pillars of Islam, zakat calls for giving 2.5% of one’s salary to the poor. Khums is giving one-fifth of one’s salary to the poor.

<sup>79</sup> Women Win, “About Us,” Women Win, <http://www.womenwin.org/about> (accessed December 5, 2010).

fitting, as Capsters were designed for the specific purpose of allowing women to play sports without constraint of a bulky hijab. Like van den Breemen, this charity works with Muslim women, but is not affiliated with Islam.

## 6. Hijabistas Create Negotiation

Although these women are a subset of Muslim women in Britain, they represent a majority of their group. The hijab “particularly in metropolitan centres and on student campuses” has become more visible and common, and “is a choice made by young women who are often well-educated and independent.”<sup>80</sup> The Islamic fashion industry has become a global economic force with 1.6 billion potential clients; however, the British Muslim woman desires something more than her sisters in the Middle East, South Asia or Eastern Africa: she desires styles and prints of her western counterparts. Although there are not any figures of sales of British veils available, the evidence that veiling has become a more important part of a British Muslim woman’s identity is noted by many scholars.<sup>81</sup> Kaye Haw, who has studied British Muslim women for fifteen years, has seen her subjects veil with the hijab in recent years, for various reasons. The availability of fashionable headscarves was a thread running through Haw’s article; one of the women stated “it was very fashionable; it had to match my outfit, the right colours, wear it in a particular way.”<sup>82</sup>

One way to measure how integrated hijab-clad women are becoming is to look at how they (and their garments) have been accepted into places which have strict uniform policies. The Avon and Somerset Constabulary (ASC) police forces have offered a hijab option to women in uniform, police and community service officers alike. This optional uniform item is designed as a multi-faith covering, just as appropriate for Catholics

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<sup>80</sup> Claire Dwyer, “The Geographies of Veiling: Muslim Women in Britain,” *Geography* 93, no. 3 (August 2008): 145.

<sup>81</sup> Nasar Meer, Claire Dwyer and Tariq Modood, “Embodying Nationhood?: Conceptions of British National Identity, Citizenship and Gender in the ‘veil Affair’,” *The Sociological Review* 58, no. 1 (2010): 89. This article cites numerous studies that discuss the resurgence of the hijab and niqab in Britain.

<sup>82</sup> Kaye Haw, “Being, Becoming and Belonging: Young Muslim Women in Contemporary Britain,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31, no. 4 (August 2010): 353.

entering churches and Jewish women in synagogue.<sup>83</sup> By allowing women to wear the headscarf in uniform, the ASC police has taken away one barrier to societal involvement for pious women. The multi-faith aspect of the garment normalizes the headscarf and removes the label as purely Muslim.

In another case of piety entering the uniformed environment, designers Van Den Breeman and Rahman were asked to create appropriate Muslim women's uniforms for prison guards and the army, respectively. This shows that Muslims are increasingly visible in the public arena, and they are "visually transforming the public sphere in the process."<sup>84</sup> Religious clothing created for these organizations will allow women to participate in society on a broader scale, whereas they may have felt uncomfortable in a position that did not allow them to wear appropriate religious attire. As Muslim women in Britain work to "expand and redefine, rather than challenge the nature of secularism and liberalism" through their fashion, they also seek acceptance by the society in which they live.<sup>85</sup> The more Muslim women who veil are seen, the more they are able to show non-Muslims who they are. Hopefully, this will lead to a sense of normalcy for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike when it comes to cultural and religious relations, and will allow Muslim women to continue to integrate.

These uniform garments normalize the relationship between covering and non-covering women, as it allows all women to serve in a job regardless of headwear. The fact that women are working as police and community workers in head coverings proves that they accept equality of work and are, in fact, an essential part of British society. Without the women to fill these public roles, Muslim women would have less visibility in society. The women who cover in uniform may seem like a contradiction of democracy, but they are actually a shining example of it; they have freedom of expression and freedom of religion while working for the public good.

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<sup>83</sup> Jenny Booth, "Women Police Officers Issued with Uniform Hijab," *Times (London)*, July 28, 2009. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article6730192.ece> (accessed December 12, 2010).

<sup>84</sup> Emma Tarlo, "Hijab Online: The Fashioning of Cyber Islamic Commerce," *interventions* 12, no. 2 (July, 2010): 209–25.

<sup>85</sup> Moors, Annelies, and Ruba Salih. "'Muslim Women' in Europe: Secular Normatives, Bodily Performances and Multiple Publics." *Social Anthropology* 17, no. 4 (2009): 375-78.

## C. BRITAIN, POLITICS, AND MUSLIM WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS WEAR

Britain prides itself in being a multicultural society, one that embraces difference and does not require any culture to adopt British values. However, some critics of multiculturalism and Muslim religious garb believe that the differences are driving British society apart. There have been three distinct cases in which the compatibility of Muslim women's religious wear with British society has been questioned: 1990 hijab case; 2002–2005 jilbab/school uniform compatibility; 2006 Jack Straw debate. Muslim women challenged Britain's non-acceptance of Muslim clothing in the public sphere, and successfully won the right to negotiate their identities through clothing in schools and the public sphere. These court battles and debates clearly show that British Muslim women embrace the British liberal democratic values of self-expression. These examples strongly support this idea.

### 1. The Hijab in School

The hijab first became an issue in British schools in 1990, when two hijab-wearing Muslim girls were denied entry into their Manchester school for wearing their headscarves. The issue went no further, however, when school authorities stated that they could wear the hijab as long as it matched the school uniform colors.<sup>86</sup> These young girls were thus able to reveal their religious preference and maintain their identity within the constraints of a secular public headscarf. This was the first example of British policy tolerance towards Muslim religious dress in a public; this decision allowed Muslim women to express their identities freely within the guidelines provided by the school's dress code policies, just as every student had the opportunity to do. These Muslim girls believed that they should be able to express their religious beliefs in a secular society, thus embodying the British value of individualism.

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<sup>86</sup> Lina Molokotos Liederman, "Religious Diversity in Schools: The Muslim Headscarf Controversy and Beyond," *Social Compass* 47, no. 3 (2000): 368.

## 2. The Jilbab Goes to Court

When schoolgirl Shabina Begum wanted to wear a jilbab at school in September 2002, she was told that she would not be allowed to “attend lessons until she wore approved clothing.”<sup>87</sup> In her school, which was eighty percent Muslim, girls were allowed to wear skirts, pants or a shalwar kameez, which is a South Asian style of a sleeveless smock with skirt over a short-sleeve blouse and a pair of long tapered pants (they can also wear headscarves that abide by uniform requirements). Begum wished to wear the jilbab because she believed that the kameez did not comply with adult female Muslim dressing requirements. Hence, she believed that the school policy which denied her education while wearing the jilbab “denied her right to manifest her religious beliefs,” so she took the school to court.<sup>88</sup>

Although the school argued that the jilbab could put its wearers at a safety risk and risk of judgment by others, the judge felt that the school effectively denied the right of Begum to attend school and practice her religion. Begum won her case and wore her jilbab to school. This case may seem cut-and-dried, but even British Muslims are divided on what it means for their community. While some see it as a step forward for personal freedoms and multiculturalism, others saw it as a “victory for fundamentalism.”<sup>89</sup> Regardless of the implications of fundamentalism, Begum was allowed to work within the British governmental system to compromise her identity. She used a democratic institution, the court system, to give herself the right to wear traditional clothing. This strongly suggests that Begum has embraced her British identity without shunning her religious identity.

## 3. Jack Straw Vs. the Niqab

Perhaps the most debated clothing item in Britain is the niqab. Because it covers everything but the wearers’ hands and feet, it has made some people nervous about what

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<sup>87</sup> Sarah Cassidy, Schoolgirl Banned from Wearing Muslim Dress Wins Appeal, *Independent (London)*, March 3, 2005.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Alison Chiesa, Right to Wear Religious Gown ‘a Victory For Muslim Values’, *Herald (Glasgow)*, March 3, 2005.



it means. Secular Muslims and native Britons have an opposing view of the niqab to that of the wearers. Prominent news columnist for *The Evening Standard*, David Sexton, called the niqab “first ridiculous and then directly offensive.”<sup>90</sup> *The Evening Standard*, and Sexton’s opinions, has a readership of 700,000, not to mention online readership, making him an influential, if not uneducated, voice in the niqab debate.<sup>91</sup> The head of Muslims for Secular Democracy, Imran Ahmad, also believes that the niqab is a step in the wrong direction for British Muslims “The veil is so steeped in subjugation, I find it so offensive someone would want to create such barriers. It’s retrograde,” said Ahmad.<sup>92</sup> However, defenders (and wearers) of the niqab say that it is a piece of fabric that represents “an act of faith, it’s solidarity,” said Al Shaikh, a niqab wearer.

In May 2006, Britain elected its first female Muslim councillor (sic), Salma Yaqoob, who also happened to wear a hijab. In the public eye, Yaqoob said that she felt pressure and anxiety from both sides, “white folk who saw a woman in a headscarf and suspected she was a terrorist sympathiser (sic) and from traditional Muslim men who believed that a woman’s place was in the home.”<sup>93</sup> Yaqoob was also the first national-level politician to don the hijab in Britain. Yaqoob was the representative for more than just politics; many of her constituents saw Yaqoob as a modern, liberated Muslim woman.<sup>94</sup> Her political office has allowed her to speak out against the right’s opposition to the face veil (niqab). Jack Straw, a British Member of Parliament (MP) said that the wearing of the niqab was “such a visible statement of separation and difference.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Jane Perlez, “Head-to-toe Muslim Veils Test Tolerance of Secular Britain,” *New York Times*, June 21, 2007. [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/21/world/europe/21iht-veil.4.6263112.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/21/world/europe/21iht-veil.4.6263112.html?_r=2) (accessed February 16, 2011).

<sup>91</sup> Laura Oliver, “Evening Standard to Increase Circulation in Move Toward Profitability,” <http://www.journalism.co.uk/news/evening-standard-to-increase-circulation-in-move-toward-profitability/s2/a539698/> (accessed January 16, 2011).

<sup>92</sup> Perlez, “Head-to-toe Muslim Veils Test Tolerance of Secular Britain,” 2007.

<sup>93</sup> *The Economist*, Sisters Are Doing It For Themselves, July 1, 2006.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* Yaqoob earned over 50 percent of the vote, and many of her female constituents went directly to the polls, vice giving their ballots to their husbands and brothers, to ensure their votes were counted. Also, the three Muslim women Members of Parliament (MPs) who were elected in 2010 do not wear the hijab while performing their official duties.

<sup>95</sup> Jack Straw, “I Want to Unveil My Views On an Important Issue,” *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1530718/I-want-to-unveil-my-views-on-an-important-issue.html> (accessed December 6, 2010).

Straw's article was not harsh in tone towards women or their choice to wear hijab, but he felt that the full-face veil disallowed meaningful dialogue between the two cultures, as facial expressions could not be interpreted through a piece of cloth.

Needless to say, Straw's article received both angry and supportive responses. Yaqoob wrote an article in defense of the niqab, and took offense to Straw's implication that "Muslim women are preventing social cohesion by their visible difference."<sup>96</sup> She believes that women should be able to choose the amount, if any, of religious clothing they wear.

Yaqoob's perspective, and the fact that she is an elected official, proves that women who cover can have a place in modern society without compromising their religious beliefs. Within British society, women are allowed to dress and act as they please and can hold virtually any job. Although the public may not embrace the niqab and consider it a symbol of difference, the political structures and opportunities (that both Straw and Yaqoob benefit from) allow the hijab, niqab and jilbab to be worn without state regulation, even in a public setting. Her election signifies that British Muslim women are streamlined into society and they share common values with the greater British population.

Straw's status allowed his comments to go beyond that of opinionated discourse; British press had a field day with his statement, fitting his words into a pre-existing framework. Although Straw only mentioned the niqab, tabloids and other news sources used his words to change the "UK's interpretive framework by borrowing from trends across Europe to portray the veiled woman as a threat."<sup>97</sup> After Straw's comments, the press' discussion on the veil has shifted from the dichotomy of eroticism and oppression to its role as the sign of failed integration and botched multiculturalism.<sup>98</sup> Straw most likely did not realize that his comments would be taken so far; however, this twisting of meaning shows how volatile the veil is in British discourse.

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<sup>96</sup>Salma Yaqoob, "We Can All Overcome Communication Barriers If We Have the Will To," *Evening Mail (Birmingham)*, October 17, 2006.

<sup>97</sup> Khiabany and Williamson, "Veiled Bodies-- Naked Racism," 2008, 70.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

The niqab came back into the news in 2007, when a student at a Buckinghamshire girls' grammar school challenged the school's uniform policy, which banned the face veil. The girl, age twelve, had three older sisters who had worn the niqab while attending the school. She felt that she should be able to wear the garment, as well. The High Court upheld the niqab ban on for the following reasons: 1. Teachers need to see children's facial expressions for effective interaction; 2. School uniform policies need to protect girls of all faiths/backgrounds equally; 3. The possibility of an unknown person sneaking into the school, covered in niqab; 4. Avoiding peer pressure by other girls to wear the niqab.<sup>99</sup> Although the ban was upheld in for the school in question, a school that was twelve miles away from the girls home allowed the niqab, so she was still able to wear the niqab at school, albeit at a different school, if she so desired.

The niqab came up once more, in relation to whether it should be allowed in the courtroom. Because the niqab covers the face except for the eyes, it does not allow witnesses, jurors, judges, or lawyers to decipher the wearer's facial expressions. The official guidance on the wearing of the full veil, or niqab, in court, stated that "the starting point should be that when an advocate wearing a full veil should be entitled to appear when wearing it. The interests of justice will be paramount...if the interests of justice are being impeded or not by the fact the advocate's face cannot be seen, or they cannot be heard clearly."<sup>100</sup> This shows that the state is accommodating towards the wearing of religious wear, and Muslim women who choose to wear the niqab have the right to express their identity through their attire in even the most religion-free spaces.

Both of these cases that deal with the niqab show that though Britain may be reluctant to fully integrate extreme coverings, the women who don the niqab wish to work within the democratic society while expressing their religious beliefs. British Muslim women have integrated into schools and public offices without giving up their

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<sup>99</sup> Sevgi Kilic, "The British Veil Wars," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 15, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 447.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

religious wear, signifying a complex identity has developed. Traditional clothing does not mean traditional mindset- women have embraced Britain's principles of freedom of religion and individualism.

Throughout the various times the hijab, niqab and jilbab were discussed in Great Britain, there has never seemed to be an attitude of outright hatred towards the women or their right to dress as they choose. Even though Straw disliked the niqab, he never made negative statements regarding the wearers. He even admitted that the garment was worn by "articulate, career-minded, educated British women."<sup>101</sup> Although there were debates in the country regarding the appropriateness of religious wear in public contexts, the religious wear was nearly always allowed (or alternatives where the women could wear the garment were offered). Britain has shown its multicultural tolerance. These cases and policies reflect the British attitude toward multiculturalism and allow women to continue to navigate between their religion and secular British society on their own terms.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

*To see the hijab 'merely as a symbol of subordination would be to miss the subtle dialect of cultural negotiation.'*<sup>102</sup>

The hijab (and other versions of Islamic clothing) are visible signs of difference in Great Britain. They scream "I am Muslim" without saying a word. However, when a woman includes Muslim in her identity, it is not the only part of her identity that she is proud of. British Muslim women create and wear Islamic dress to outwardly express their identities, aspects of which are both traditional and modern, to reflect their Muslim and British cultures. Designing and selling Islamic clothing has allowed women to express their identities of creativity and independence. Incorporating modern patterns and colors into their garments give a nod to of-the-moment trends while keeping the traditional modesty of the clothing. Selling the garments also allows other Muslim women to negotiate their identities, as preference is shown in the purchase. The capitalist

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<sup>101</sup> Munira Mirza, Abi Senthilkumaran and Zein Ja'far, "Living Apart Together: British Muslims and the Paradox of Multiculturalism," *Policy Exchange* (2007): 43.

<sup>102</sup> Humayun Ansari, "Report: Muslims in Britain," *Minority Rights Group International* (August 2002): 16.

hijabi has helped to create the British Muslim female identity that both embraces the freedoms a liberal democracy provides and the comforts of religion.

Identities and values were challenged when women had to defend their right to wear Islamic garments in public spaces. However, British policies that support multiculturalism allowed the women to prevail and wear their garments as they pleased (although they sometimes had to do so at another institution. The fact that British Muslim women challenged policies proves that they are neither ignorant nor repressed as they have been accused of being.<sup>103</sup> Women of all ages “may think of themselves as migrants, as wives, mothers or as ‘British Muslims.’”<sup>104</sup> British Muslim women are active members of society. By wearing (or not wearing), designing and fighting for Islamic clothing, British Muslim women are expressing their freedoms as Britons and valuing the piety of being a Muslim.

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<sup>103</sup> Veiled Muslim women have been viewed through the Orientalist lens as “more ignorant than unveiled women” since Europeans started travelling to the Middle East and South Asia. Heideh Moghissi, *Women and Islam: Images and Realities* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 112. “Newer forms of Orientalist discourse... attribute... a passive, ignorant and submissive nature to all fundamentalist women.” Elizabeth Anne Castelli and Rosamond Rodman (eds.), “Transnationalism, Feminism and Fundamentalism,” *Women, Gender and Religion: A Reader* (2001): 121.

<sup>104</sup> Haleh Afshar, Rob Aitken and Myfanwy Franks, “Feminisms, Islamophobia and Identities,” *Political Studies* 53 (2005): 273.

### **III. FIGHTING THE MAN: FORCED MARRIAGE AND IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN BRITAIN**

As compared with an earlier position of laissez-faire tolerance or indifference, when violence against women in minority communities often went unacknowledged, there have been some significant achievements in the last decade. This was substantially as a result of the ongoing work of minority women's NGOs, but other key factors were...a developing culture of consultation between government departments and NGOs and the role of the media in highlighting individual cases.<sup>105</sup>

#### **A. INTRODUCTION—THE PROBLEM OF FORCED MARRIAGE**

Forced marriage has followed immigrants to Britain. It occurs when a family or group forces a child (usually female), to marry someone who she does not want to marry. Means (abuse) to the ends (marriage) can be brutal or undetectable. In all cases of forced marriage, however, the result is the same: a woman in a marriage she did not choose. The family crime is not compatible with international law or Britain's value system. United Nations and British law allow each Briton to choose his or her spouse, and removing choice from this union violates the British family unit. This practice challenges British norms of marriage and British Muslim and Sikh women, as well as the British government, have found them unsuitable for a liberal democracy. Despite the societal prevalence of multiculturalist policies, which, in the past, have forgiven cultural differences that are incompatible with British values, gender equality and women's rights are now more valued than upholding cultural diversity.

Aided by international law and the British government's anti-forced marriage policies, British women are helping to negotiate their identities between the perceived tradition of chosen marriage and modern love marriage. These women have embraced their freedoms that a liberal democracy provides, and advocate for their cause using tactics associated with Western feminism. Advocacy, prevention and victim's rights are the major ways British women's policy has changed as a result of the feedback from

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<sup>105</sup> Moira Dustin and Anne Phillips, "Whose Agenda Is It? Abuses of Women and Abuses of 'culture' in Britain," *Ethnicities* 8, no. 3 (2008): 419.

British victims of forced marriage. Women have worked to eliminate the traditional opinion that this is merely a Muslim or South Asian issue by using modern means of negotiation and advocacy.

How are British Muslim women shaping their identities in the fight against forced marriage and what kind of support (if any) are they getting from the British government?

### **1. What Is Forced Marriage?**

Before discussing the problems of and conceived solutions for forced marriage, it must be defined and understood as a type of arranged marriage that does not leave room for choice. Arranged marriage is defined by the British government's Home Office as:

In an arranged marriage, families take the lead in selecting a marriage partner but the couple have the free will and choice to accept or decline the arrangement. The tradition of arranged marriages has operated successfully within many communities and countries for a very long time.<sup>106</sup>

Basically, "if the parties consent, the marriage cannot be considered as forced."<sup>107</sup>

Forced marriage, on the other hand, leaves no room for free will. The Home Office defines this type of arrangement as:

A forced marriage is a marriage in which one or both spouses do not (or, in the case of some vulnerable adults, cannot) consent to the marriage and duress is involved. Duress can include physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional pressure.<sup>108</sup>

The Home Office's emphasis that forced marriage is unacceptable creates an atmosphere of intolerance towards this act.

Although the definitions of forced and arranged marriage seem to leave no margin for doubt, in reality, the line between the two is very blurry. "A sharp dichotomy between arranged and forced marriage can be misleading," notes a report from law

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<sup>106</sup> Home Office, "UK Border Agency: Forced Marriage," Home Office, <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/partnersandfamilies/forcedmarriage/> (accessed February 1, 2011).

<sup>107</sup> Anne Phillips and Moira Dustin, "Uk Initiatives On Forced Marriage: Regulation, Dialogue and Exit," *Political Studies* 52 (2004): 537.

<sup>108</sup> HM Government, Home Office, "The Right to Choose: Multi-agency statutory guidance for dealing with forced marriage," N.A., (London, U.K.: Forced Marriage Unit), 8.

scholar Abdullahi An-Na'im.<sup>109</sup> Kidnapping, house arrest and (threats of) physical violence are obvious indicators that there is some sort of forcing going on. However, subtleties like verbal and emotional abuse or not allowing the girl to attend school or class functions can be ways of parents exerting control on their daughter. Amarit Wilson, who has done extensive studies on South Asian women in Great Britain notes that coercion is a very strong motivator that can be used in "family-arranged marriages across religious and class divisions."<sup>110</sup> This is why it is so difficult to decide if a marriage has been forced or not.

As more victims of forced marriage surface, both the native British and South Asian populations are becoming aware of the problems associated with marriage that is chosen by the family in which the husband, wife, or both, have no choice in the union. While some families try to disguise forced marriage as arranged marriage, the two are not the same. Like many other domestic crimes, numbers are often underreported. With ties to the family, friends and a greater social circle, victims of forced marriage are often too afraid or intimidated to come forward about their experiences. This issue affects immigrant populations from all backgrounds; victims from the Indian subcontinent (South Asia), Africa and the Middle East were interviewed for a 2007 Home Office report on forced marriage.<sup>111</sup>

The definition of forced marriage gets even more confounded when it is brought outside of the government and academic realms. According to a Home Office report on forced marriage from 2007, young Bangladeshi girls thought that forced marriage was common in their community, while men and older women perceived that arranged marriage was the norm.<sup>112</sup> It is important to note that in this case, forced marriage and arranged marriage may actually be the same thing, but the affected (victim) population

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<sup>109</sup> Abdullahi An-Na'im. "Forced Marriage," CIMEL and INTERRIGHTS "Honour" Crimes Project, <http://www.soas.ac.uk/honourcrimes/resources/file55689.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>110</sup> Amarit Wilson, "The Forced Marriage Debate and the British State," *Race and Class* 49, no. 25 (2007): 31.

<sup>111</sup> Marianne Hester, et al., "Forced Marriage: The Risk Factors and the Effect of Raising the Minimum Age for a Sponsor, and of Leave to Enter the UK as a Spouse or Fiancée," Home Office (London, UK, Home Office 2007), 24-26.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.



knows they are being forced, whereas the older women may see forced marriage as simply an arranged marriage. The fact that these two terms are used as if they were one in the same by a community affected by this type of union shows that what is considered forced marriage is open to individual interpretation. A parent selecting a spouse for his or her child has historical roots in some form in almost every country.

The concepts of dowry, class, status and honor have played into decisions to marry for hundreds of years. “Until the late eighteenth century, most societies around the world saw marriage as far too vital an economic and political institution to be left entirely to free choice of the two individuals involved, especially if they were going to base their decision on something as unreasoning and transitory as love.”<sup>113</sup> During the Enlightenment period, “a gigantic marital revolution had occurred in Western Europe and North America.”<sup>114</sup> However, this revolution in the way marriages were carried out did not occur uniformly throughout the world. When South Asians arrived in Britain en masse post-World War II, the practice of arranged marriage was already outdated in western society. New immigrants in Britain still practice arranged marriage, but recently a light has been cast upon this practice, as it can be turned into the devastating practice of forced marriage.

Forced marriage has generally been associated with immigrants in the UK. It is perceived as a cultural/religious issue carried out by South Asians and people from the Middle East. However, forced marriage statistics show that immigrants from Africa and China are at risk, as well.<sup>115</sup> When the first forced marriage initiative began in 1999, Ann Cryer, a Member of Parliament for Keighley, “appealed to ‘the leaders of the Asian Muslim community’ to: ‘encourage their people to put their daughters’ happiness, welfare and human rights first.’”<sup>116</sup> This racialized speech engrained in the British mind that Muslims were the only ones who were victims and perpetrators of forced marriage.

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<sup>113</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin (Non-Classics), 2006), 5.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Hester, et al., “Forced Marriage,” 2007, 24.

<sup>116</sup> Wilson, “The Forced Marriage Debate and the British State,” 2007, 31.

The Home Office admits that there is no typical victim of forced marriage, but some communities have a larger percentage of victims than others. British scholars Moira Dustin and Anne Phillips agree that forced marriage is a subject that is treated with caution by the British public because it is “[hard] to address abuses of women without simultaneously promoting stereotypes of culture.”<sup>117</sup>

## **2. Who Practices Forced Marriage and How Prevalent Is It in Britain?**

The number of helpline calls shed some light on the extent of the forced marriage problem in Britain. The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), a governmental organization that is a subdivision of the Home Office, deals exclusively with assisting victims of forced marriage. The FMU hotline received 1,652 calls to its hotline in 2009.<sup>118</sup> The Honour Network, a non-governmental resource and advocacy hotline for victims of forced marriage run by South Asian women, received over 9000 calls in its first two years; sixty-five percent of the calls in the first four months were from victims of forced marriages.<sup>119</sup> These numbers are low estimates of the number of women who suffer forced marriage. Victims of forced marriage are known as a “hard to reach group,” as they may not talk to authorities about their situations or label their marriages as forced (at the time of wedlock).<sup>120</sup> This makes it difficult to accurately measure the prevalence of forced marriage. However, the fact that these women are reaching out proves that they are rethinking ideas that have been touted as “tradition.” These women understand that in a liberal democracy like Britain, they do not have to be victims of forced marriage.

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<sup>117</sup> Dustin and Phillips, “Whose Agenda Is It?” 2008, 405–24.

<sup>118</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Travel and Living Abroad,” Victims of Forced Marriage, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/when-things-go-wrong/forced-marriage/> (accessed February 1, 2011).

<sup>119</sup> Karma Nirvana, “Honour Network,” Karma Nirvana, <http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/honour-network> (accessed January 5, 2011).

<sup>120</sup> Khatidja Chantler, “Forced Marriage in the UK: Religious, Cultural, Economic or State Violence?” *Critical Social Policy* 29, no. 4 (November 2009):592.

Ethnic communities that have the strongest links to forced marriage are Pakistani and Bangladeshi, and a high percentage of these women are Muslim.<sup>121</sup> Although there are other ethnicities and religions (like Sikh) that deal with forced marriage, studies on victims continuously show that groups from the Asian sub-continent have the most instances of forced marriage; in a study by the British Home Office, eighty-seven percent of forced marriage victims were of South Asian descent.<sup>122</sup>

Patriarchy, supported by either religion or culture, is one of the main driving forces behind forced marriage. According to the Community Liaison Unit (CLU)'s report, which is based on multiple focus groups with Britons of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, the phenomenon of forced marriage can be traced to the notions of "(i) family, (ii) sexuality and independent behavior and (iii) honour."<sup>123</sup>

Family and honor are closely connected as motives for forced marriage: *zat* (a caste-like group) is related to *izzat* (honor), and "honor is associated with competition between families, family respect and the control of the women's behavior."<sup>124</sup> Marrying someone with the right background can bring a woman's family "respect and status in the community."<sup>125</sup> Alison Shaw's article regarding consanguineous marriages between British Pakistanis shows that family and caste heavily influence spouse selection in an arranged marriage.<sup>126</sup> Another important factor in forced marriage is the amount of influence parents have on their children in the culture. South Asian Muslim families "exert a tremendous pull on these young women and appear to have abundant power over

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<sup>121</sup> Yunas Samad and John Eade, *Community Perceptions of Forced Marriage* (n.p.: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2003), 108. High rates of unemployment (over twenty percent), unemployment and "low human capital" for both groups have led to a higher significance placed on family units. (128/108)

<sup>122</sup> Hester, et al., "Forced Marriage," 2007, 40. 33/38 survivors identified themselves as "British Asian, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi."

<sup>123</sup> British Home Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *A Choice by Right: The Report by the Working Group on Forced Marriage*, co-chairs Baroness Uddin and Lord Ahmed, 14.

<sup>124</sup> Samad and Eade, *Community Perceptions of Forced Marriage*, 2003, 39.

<sup>125</sup> Sherene Razack, "Imperilled Muslim Women, Dangerous Muslim Men and Civilised Europeans: Legal and Social Responses to Forced Marriages," *Feminist Legal Studies* 12 (2004): 164

<sup>126</sup> Alison Shaw, "Kinship, Cultural Preference and Immigration: Consanguineous Marriage Among British Pakistanis," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7, no. 2 (June 2001).

them.”<sup>127</sup> In fact, many older immigrants believe that the issue of forced marriage is overplayed by the media; the real problem “lies with the youth who go against the wishes of their parents.”<sup>128</sup> “There is little doubt that both arranged and forced marriages spring from an impulse to control women’s sexuality, and that such controls are exercised more vigorously when communities feel themselves to be losing control.”<sup>129</sup> By blaming the victims for not wanting to wed a chosen partner, the parents (and other family members) create a rationalization for coercion (force).

However, the CLU’s report noted that “sexuality and independent behaviour” is the “major motive families forcing their children into marriage.”<sup>130</sup> When a young woman begins dating or acting outside the acceptable sexual norms, the parents feel the need to control her behavior. Bangladeshis have described in a Home Office report that forced marriages were “more likely to occur if the young woman was acting outside of the community ‘norms.’”<sup>131</sup> The need for the family patriarch to control women’s behavior is supported by religion and/or culture. Studies have found that “gendered surveillance of young South Asian women” lends itself to forced marriage; women’s sexuality must be guarded, so when parents see that their daughter is acting outside of set parameters, they must act, sometimes forcing marriage to restore honor.<sup>132</sup> Another reason for forced marriage is a lack of a family’s acceptance of homosexuality.

Retaining a sense of culture is another excuse families use to justify forced marriage. Immigrants fear becoming too “British” if they marry outside of their ethnicity. This is seen mainly in first and second generation immigrant families. The high rate of Western divorce is another reason that families choose arranged or forced

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<sup>127</sup> Susan Okin, “Feminism and Multiculturalism: Some Tensions,” *Ethics* 108, no. 4 (July 1998): 683.

<sup>128</sup> Samad and Eade, *Community Perceptions of Forced Marriage*, 2003, 64–65.

<sup>129</sup> Sherene Razack, “Imperilled Muslim Women, Dangerous Muslim Men and Civilised Europeans: Legal and Social Responses to Forced Marriages,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 12 (2004): 165.

<sup>130</sup> Samad and Eade, *Community Perceptions of Forced Marriage*, 2003, 56.

<sup>131</sup> Marianne Hester et al., “Forced Marriage,” 2007, 26.

<sup>132</sup> Chantler, “Forced Marriage in the UK,” 2009. Hester, et al., “Forced Marriage,” 2007.

marriage for their children.<sup>133</sup> These families see the arranged (or forced) marriage as a cure to the ills brought about by Western or British culture.<sup>134</sup>

### 3. What Are “British Values” and How Does Forced Marriage Violate These?

Forced marriage is not compatible with a liberal democracy such as Britain. Although the country accepts the term “multiculturalism” as a way to “affirm the distinctness, uniqueness and individual validity of different cultures,” the country cannot affirm something in the name of culture that is an invalid, harmful practice.<sup>135</sup> The British government affirmed its view that “the first essential of a valid marriage is consent. Anything short of consent makes the marriage a nullity [from the beginning]” in the groundbreaking case of *Singh v. Singh* (1971).<sup>136</sup> This court case implied that the due to the issue of non-consent, the practice of forced marriage was not compatible with British values and set the stage for future action against practitioners of forced marriage.

Furthering justice against forced marriage in the case of *Hirani v Hirani* (1982), a young woman successfully petitioned for a nullity, as the judge felt that threats from her parents were enough to coerce the woman into marriage.<sup>137</sup> As a result, the definition of forced marriage in Britain can be subjective and does not necessarily mean that the girl or woman is physically harmed during the process. British law recognizes that coercion and threats to women in forced marriage cases tend to be nonviolent. However, the court system in Britain does not count for nuances when it comes to forced marriage. The courts have decided what consent is regarding marriage. Consent is consent regardless of

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<sup>133</sup> Office for National Statistics, “National Statistics Online- Divorces,” Office for National Statistics, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=170> (accessed January 19, 2011). (11.2 divorces per 1,000 married people in 2008)

<sup>134</sup> HM Government, Home Office, “The Right to Choose: Multi-agency statutory Guidance for dealing with forced marriage,” N.A., (London, U.K.: Forced Marriage Unit), 9.

<sup>135</sup> Veena Meetoo and Heidi Safia Mirza, “‘There is nothing ‘Honourable’ about honour killings’: Gender, violence and the limits of multiculturalism,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 30 (2007): 190.

<sup>136</sup> Gender Equality Digest, “Casefinal,” Gender Equality Digest, <http://webdb.lse.ac.uk/gender/Casefinaldetail.asp?id=49&pageno=4#> (accessed January 24, 2011).

<sup>137</sup> Samia Bano, “Muslim and South Asian Women: Customary Law and Citizenship in Britain,” in *Women, Citizenship and Difference*, eds. Pnina Werbner and Nira Yuval Davis. (New York: Zed Books, 1999), 168–169.

intent or pressure; according to a British judge who wrote in a 1993 decision for *Mahmud v Mahmud*, a marriage entered “with however ill a grace and however resentfully,” still constitutes a “valid” marriage.<sup>138</sup> The court system is not perfect, but it has assisted women who do not consent to marriage.

The British government has funded several studies on forced marriage risk factors and created the FMU as an attempt to curb and eventually eliminate this practice. However, non-governmental agencies run by women are crucial in the fight against forced marriage; these agencies provide legal support, shelter and advice for victims of forced marriage. Many of the women who work at the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are former victims of forced marriage, so they are able to better understand the victim’s psyche than any government policy could. Women have used the NGOs as a platform to speak out against forced marriage throughout the UK.

## **B. INTERNATIONAL LAW**

Although international law cannot be enforced in the same way as national law, its existence implies that there are a set of mores and values that are shared by many countries. As an international body, the United Nations (UN) ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Article 16(2) states that “marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.”<sup>139</sup> This shows that choice in marriage is an international value and forcing marriage is against a set of agreed-upon rules. Although the United Kingdom was one of the founding members of the UN, the UDHR was not followed in regards to the UK’s immigrant population. Forty-six years later, UN General Recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) from 1994 described

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<sup>138</sup>Gender Equality Digest, “Casefinal,” Gender Equality Digest, <http://webdb.lse.ac.uk/gender/Casefinaldetail.asp?id=122&pageno=1> (accessed January 24, 2011).

<sup>139</sup> United Nations, “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a16> (accessed January 19, 2011).

how important choice in spouse selection is to a woman.<sup>140</sup> This document brings more legitimacy in the worldwide fight against forced marriage. As a member of the CEDAW and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the UK recognizes that forced marriage violates international human rights decrees.

### **C. MULTICULTURALISM, INTEGRATIONISM AND GENDER RIGHTS: HOW THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT SPARKED THE DEBATE**

British multiculturalism once had a reputation for celebrating perceived cultural diversity. Tolerance was tested after 9/11 and 7/7 attacks left Britons questioning what went wrong with the diasporic populations within their country. However, the British government officials did not state that the government needed to move “beyond multiculturalism” until 2001; Home Secretary David Blunkett stated that immigrants needed to accept British values as their own if they wanted to live in Britain.<sup>141</sup> Integrationism, which politicians hoped would create a more cohesive society that would be more culturally British, was the new framework adopted by the government. Blunkett stated that people who come to Britain should be willing to adopt “British” values: “We have norms of acceptability and those who come into our home... should accept those norms.”<sup>142</sup>

In recent years, criticisms of multiculturalism include the promotion of “parallel lives” for immigrants and other non-ethnic Britons.<sup>143</sup> These groups have lived in British society while maintaining strong roots in their respective subcultures. Gender relations are a large part of the criticisms on multiculturalism, because until the 1990s, there was not much association between the treatment of women and multiculturalism. This

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<sup>140</sup> United Nations, “General Recommendations Made by the Committee On the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women,” Division for the Advancement of Women: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm> (accessed January 19, 2011). “A woman’s right to choose a spouse and enter freely into marriage is central to her life and to her dignity and equality as a human being... a woman’s right to choose when, if, and whom she will marry must be protected and enforced at law.”

<sup>141</sup> Christian Joppke, “The Retreat of Multiculturalism in the Liberal State: Theory and Policy,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 55, no. 2 (2004): 251.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Moira Dustin and Anne Phillips, “Whose Agenda Is It?: Abuses of Women and Abuses of ‘culture’ in Britain,” *Ethnicities* 8, no. 3 (2008): 406.

complacency allowed many violations of women's rights under the auspices of culture or religion occur. One of those overlooked rights was marriage practices. In 1969, a forced marriage of a thirteen-year-old child to a much older man, for example, was described as “‘entirely natural’ in Nigeria, where the marriage was conducted.”<sup>144</sup> This is only one example of how British policies that supported multiculturalism left women vulnerable to abuses in the name of culture. The policies that supported multiculturalism and abuses of culture have moved aside in favor of integrationist policies that aim to protect all citizens' human rights, regardless of culture.

The shift in values from multiculturalism to integration in regards to women's policy started in 1997, with the election of the Labour Party and an increase in women parliamentarians from sixty to a hundred and twenty.<sup>145</sup> The new female politicians were “willing to speak out against abuses of women” and issues of forced marriage and female genital mutilation were discussed openly in parliament.<sup>146</sup>

### **1. The 1999 Working Group on Forced Marriage**

In 1999, light was shed on forced marriage in Great Britain. Nineteen-year-old Rukshana Naz, a British Muslim woman who lived in Derby, was “ritualistically strangled” by her brother while her mother held her down in 1998. The reason her brother gave for this sadistic crime was that Naz abandoned her (forced) marriage and had returned to a man whom she loved.<sup>147</sup> Naz's case was highly publicized, and created a dialogue about forced marriage outside of the Muslim community.

The British government first began to specifically address forced marriage the same year, when a Working Group on Forced Marriage, consisting of community leaders

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<sup>144</sup> Dustin and Phillips, “Whose Agenda Is It?” 2008, 406.

<sup>145</sup> UK Political Info, “Women MPs and Parliamentary Candidates Since 1945,” UK Political Info, <http://www.ukpolitical.info/FemaleMPs.htm> (accessed January 24, 2011).

<sup>146</sup> Dustin and Phillips, “Whose Agenda Is It?” 2008, 407.

<sup>147</sup> Hannana Siddiqui. “‘It was written in her kimset’: forced marriage.” In *From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers: Southall Black Sisters*, ed. Rahila Gupta. (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2004), 67–91.



and Asian women's groups, was created by the British Home Office.<sup>148</sup> The working group published their report, *A Choice by Right*, in June 2000. This report was the first attempt by the British government to create a conversation or debate around forced marriage. The report has been criticized for creating "a deluge of racist articles in the British press about brutal South Asian parents" though the document did point out that "forced marriage is not just an 'Asian' issue."<sup>149</sup> The debate the report called for was led by the media instead of the government, as the report had intended. Despite the amount of negativity created by the report, it did have a positive aspect; *A Choice by Right* revealed forced marriage as a practice that would not be tolerated in Britain. "Since the beginning of 1999, we have experienced unprecedented levels of public discussion about forced marriage," stated Pragna Patel, a leading member of the Southall Black Sisters, in a recorded radio interview.<sup>150</sup> The dialogue between Asian women and the government that led to *A Choice by Right* was a first step towards policies to protect women from and in forced marriage. The creation of this committee and subsequent report suggests that British Muslim women are utilizing democratic ideals by working with the government to create policy.

## **2. The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act and Forced Marriage Unit**

As follow-up to *A Choice by Right*, the British government enacted the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act (FMA) in 2007. The FMA allows court orders to protect "a person from being forced into a marriage or from any attempt to be forced into a marriage; or a person who has been forced into a marriage."<sup>151</sup> This policy was a major

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<sup>148</sup> Amarit Wilson, "The Forced Marriage Debate and the British State," *Race and Class* 49, no. 25 (2007): 31–32. Hannana Siddiqui of the Southall Black Sisters (SBS) participated in the group, but left the group and stated that the British government needed to "mainstream the issue of forced marriage by incorporating it in its national strategy on violence against women and children."

<sup>149</sup> Wilson, "The Forced Marriage Debate and the British State," 2007, 33. British Home Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *A Choice by Right: The Report by the Working Group on Forced Marriage*, co-chairs Baroness Uddin and Lord Ahmed, 12.

<sup>150</sup> Rahlia Gupta, *From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers: Southall Black Sisters*, ed. Rahila Gupta (London: Zed Books, 2004), 68.

<sup>151</sup> United Kingdom Government Legislation. [legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk), "Forced Marriage (civil Protection) Act 2007," <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/20/section/1/wales/enacted> (accessed January 5, 2011).

change in British legislation, which had previously had the tendency to focus directly on the overseas aspect of forced marriage.<sup>152</sup> The FMA protected victims of both domestic and overseas crimes. This helped the British government disassociate (recent) immigrants from forced marriage.

This is the first British law to deal directly with forced marriages and victim protection. The law created the Forced Marriage Unit (a joint venture between the Foreign and Commonwealth office and Home Office), which is an entity dedicated solely to the prevention of forced marriage and to providing assistance to victims. The FMU created a multi-media program to educate police, educators, doctors and anyone else who may come into contact with a woman in a forced marriage. The FMU focuses much of their training resources online, where they can be accessed by anyone who signs up on the website. Training videos, animated situational drama, focus on forced marriage and how people of certain professions (e.g., doctor) can help victims. Posters produced by the FMU urge victims, or anyone who knows a victim, to contact the FMU for assistance. The posters come in ten languages, which allow the government to reach women who do not speak English. Perhaps the most critical piece of information on the website is the survivor's handbook. This sixty-page document tells a victim everything she needs to do to escape her forced marriage with the help of the British state. It covers everything from immediate needs, such as how to contact the consulate if she is stuck overseas, to long-term needs, such as education and how to find a job. This booklet is extremely useful to a woman who has to give up her whole life and family to escape forced marriage. The FMU uses a holistic approach to victim recovery.

There have been criticisms that the FMU does not do enough to protect the victims, and that it is difficult for victims to contact the FMU because of the severe consequences for the victims if they are found out by family members. Despite criticisms,

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<sup>152</sup> Dustin and Phillips, "Whose Agenda Is It?" 2008, 406. Previous policies focused on preventing forced marriage, such as raising the age for sponsorship of a spouse from sixteen to eighteen years old, were heavily criticized as coded towards immigration.

the FMU gave “advice or support” to 1682 victims of forced marriage in 2009.<sup>153</sup> The Foreign Office and FMU also understand that they need to work with NGOs and minority women’s organizations because they “have the credibility on the ground, have the contacts on the ground.”<sup>154</sup> By dispelling myths surrounding forced marriage, these groups have trained the FMU (and as a result, the British population) what the signs of forced marriage are, and how to approach victims.

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<sup>153</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office. “Travel and Living Abroad.” Victims of Forced Marriage. <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/when-things-go-wrong/forced-marriage/> (accessed February 1, 2011).

<sup>154</sup> *Love, Honour and Disobey*, DVD, directed by Saeeda Khanum (UK: Faction Films, 2005).

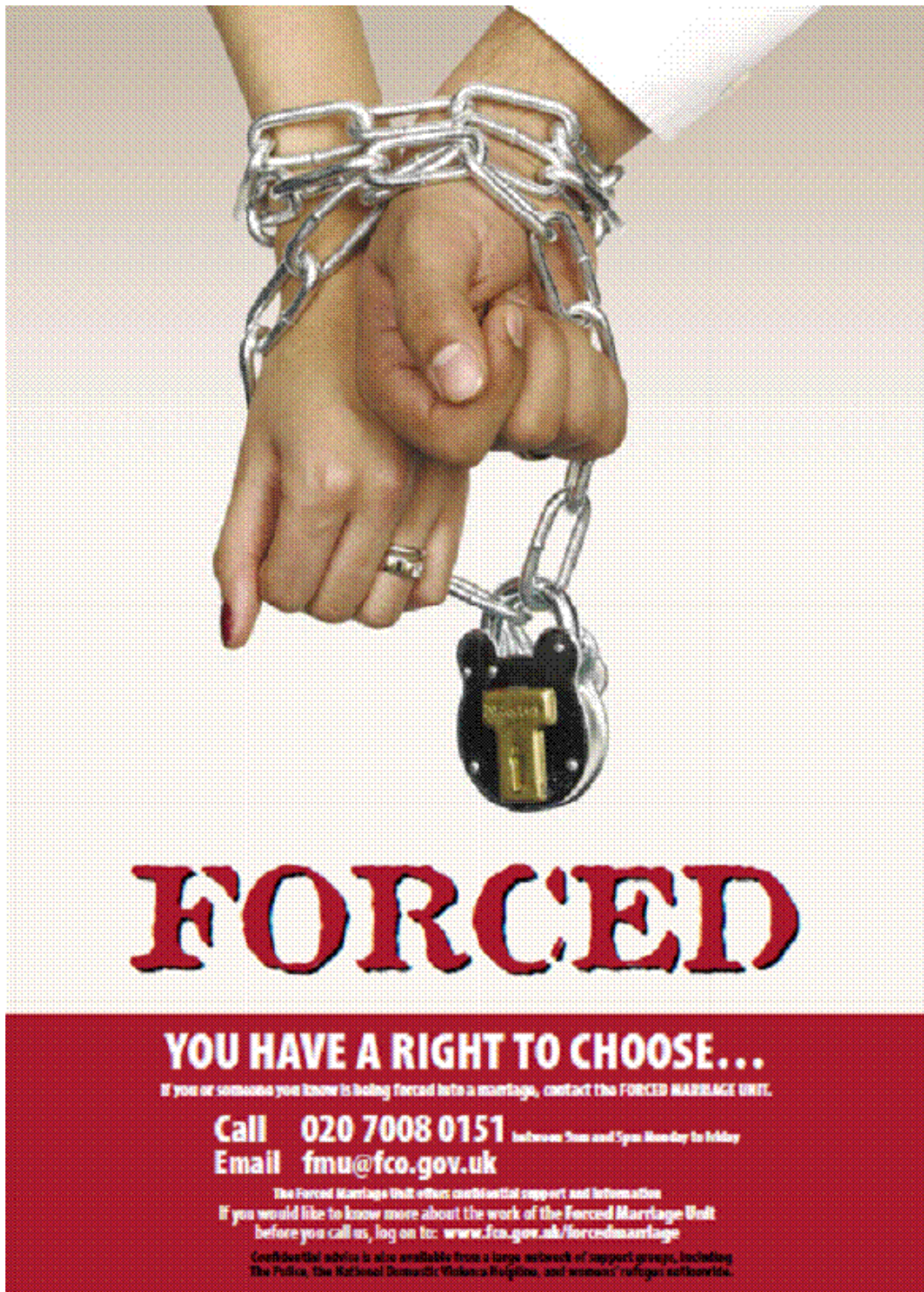


Figure 6. Poster from Britain's Forced Marriage Unit. <sup>155</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Travel and Living Abroad," Victims of Forced Marriage, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/when-things-go-wrong/forced-marriage/> (accessed February 1, 2011).

### 3. “How Do We Raise This [Issue] Without Inviting a Racist Backlash?”<sup>156</sup>

Many scholars believe that the British government has targeted South Asian women in the war against forced marriage, thus creating a constructed racial identity of South Asian women as victims. While the British government focuses on victims, who tend to be mostly South Asian, the news media exacerbates the racist dialogue. When *A Choice by Right*, the report that resulted from the working group on forced marriage was published in 2000, it “led to a deluge of racist articles about brutal South Asian parents.”<sup>157</sup> The media created a “debate” in which they picked the experts and the victims based on their own viewpoints. Some articles briefly outlined the results of the report, while others lamented the cruelty of South Asian parents who whisk their daughters to Pakistan for forced marriage. Few articles mentioned that the problem happened in various cultures in Britain; the focus was primarily on South Asians, or sometimes Muslims.

The continuous focus on South Asians as perpetrators of forced marriage may not be unrealistic, but some in the South Asian community feel that the media and government are focusing too much of their efforts surrounding forced marriage on South Asians as a community, vice looking at the issue from a broader perspective. This is a danger when dealing with issues that cross both racial and gender lines. When the government tries to protect immigrant women, it is seen as racist. In the film “Love, Honour & Disobey,” Southall Black Sister director Pragna Patel stated “[community leaders] often play into this argument, ‘well, it is racist for you to interfere within our communities.’... as a result...the state obliges... by not helping women in these communities, by not giving them protection in the name of cultural sensitivity.”<sup>158</sup> Until 2000 (and publication of *A Choice by Right*), the government utilized a hands-off approach in the name of multiculturalism to deal with forced marriage. This tactic was changed, because it implicitly accepts oppressive gender relations (and women continue

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<sup>156</sup> *Love, Honour and Disobey*, DVD, directed by Saeeda Khanum (UK: Faction Films, 2005).

<sup>157</sup> Wilson, “The Forced Marriage Debate and the British State,” 2007, 32.

<sup>158</sup> *Love, Honour and Disobey*, DVD, directed by Saeeda Khanum (UK: Faction Films, 2005)

to suffer in forced marriages as a result).<sup>159</sup> It is important for the British government to walk a fine line between racism and allowing abuses of women in the name of culture.

#### **D. WHAT ARE IMMIGRANT WOMEN DOING TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM?**

“There was a history of minority women’s activism on... forced marriage...before [this] became prominent in public policy and debate.”<sup>160</sup> For decades, minority women in Britain have spoken out against the harmful effects of forced marriage; however, the British government did not invest time or resources into the issue. Once the British government began to focus on the issue, as well, immigrant voices were heard in the news media. NGOs run by British Asian women have influenced government policies and procedures, and the establishment of these organizations inside Britain suggests that this group has embraced the independence and freedoms afforded to them by their nation.<sup>161</sup> British Muslim women have focused on the forced marriage debate through advocacy, shaping their identities as survivors, not victims.

##### **1. Jasvinder Sanghera and Karma Nirvana: Supporting Victims and Dispelling Myths Through Education**

Advocacy for the end of forced marriages has become more public in recent years. One of the most visible spokeswomen of forced marriages is Jasvinder Sanghera, who narrowly escaped a forced marriage in the 1970s. Her parents came from the Punjab in India in the 1950s and Sanghera herself was born and raised in Britain. Her experiences of being locked in a room and being “abused, physically and mentally” when she refused to marry a man to whom she was promised to since she was eight-years-old

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<sup>159</sup> Wilson, “The Forced Marriage Debate and the British State,” 2007, 30.

<sup>160</sup> Dustin and Phillips, “Whose Agenda Is It?” 2008, 405-24.

<sup>161</sup> The term “Asian” instead of “Muslim” is used here because Jasvinder Sanghera (of Pakistani descent) is a Sikh. This goes to prove that forced marriage has stronger cultural than religious ties. Although she is not a Muslim, Sanghera’s NGO has benefitted many Muslim (as well as Sikh) women in Britain.

has led her to advocate for fellow victims.<sup>162</sup> The author of *Shame* and *Daughters of Shame* has taken the conversation of forced marriage out of the shadows in her books and through her charitable agency Karma Nirvana. Created in 1993, after Sanghera's sister Robina committed suicide to escape her abusive forced marriage, Karma Nirvana "supports victims and survivors of forced marriage and honour based abuse."<sup>163</sup> Karma Nirvana provided the first "Asian Women's refuge in Derby and Stoke-on-Trent and are currently in the early stages of developing the first Asian male refuge for victims of forced marriage and honour based violence."<sup>164</sup>

Sanghera tells the story that the women in her family were the abusers, which is consistent with studies that have found that "women internalize patriarchal ideology and then become its enforcers." Women, through socialization "are not simply coerced into supporting forced marriages, but can be the primary agents."<sup>165</sup> This is why it is so important that women like Sanghera are speaking out and advocating the end of forced marriage; so many young immigrant women are indoctrinated with the idea that women have no choice in marriage.

Karma Nirvana is a network of women (and occasional men) who had been victims of honour crimes, and expanded to include the Honour Network Hotline (HNH) in April 2008. The HNH is a confidential service for victims of honor-based crimes to receive support and advice regarding their situations. Many of the people who receive the calls are former victims of forced marriage themselves, and "all call-handlers received a comprehensive training course on the issues," which include the role of law enforcement, the FMU, and child protection issues.<sup>166</sup> From its opening on April 11,

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<sup>162</sup> Rebecca Seal and Eva Wiseman, "Abducted. Abused. Raped. Survived. British Asian Women Are Being Pushed by Their Families Into Forced Marriages, Unprotected by the Authorities.," *Guardian (London)*, January 11, 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/11/british-asian-forced-marriages/print> (accessed January 7, 2011).

<sup>163</sup> Karma Nirvana, "Karma Nirvana: Support for Forced Marriages," Karma Nirvana, <http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/> (accessed January 5, 2011).

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Samad and Eade, *Community Perceptions of Forced Marriage*, 2003, 73–74.

<sup>166</sup> Karma Nirvana, "Honour Network," Karma Nirvana, <http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/honour-network> (accessed January 5, 2011).

2008 to March 31, 2010, the HNH received over 9000 calls; sixty-five percent of the calls in the first four months were from victims of forced marriages.<sup>167</sup> Other individuals and agencies, such as doctors, housing officials, teachers and police officers, call the HNH to ask about specific individuals who may be victims of honor-based crimes. An important aspect of the agency is that it completely respects the privacy of the victims and does not contact her family at any time, as “mediation can put our victims at risk.”<sup>168</sup> Because fear of family rejection is one of the major blockades to prevent victims from getting help, the promise to leave the family out of the solution should remove this blockade for women who wish to help themselves. Sanghera created Karma Nirvana to dispel misconceptions about forced marriage and increase awareness about the problem. It seems her efforts to help victims are paying off: the HNH received 5600 calls in 2009, a 53percent increase from 2008.<sup>169</sup> This shows that people are educating themselves about forced marriage and victims are seeking help. These victims realize that Britain provides support and options for them to leave their forced marriage. This data shows that British victims of forced marriage have embraced and take advantage the freedoms allotted by their government.

Perhaps the most innovative thing that Sanghera has done through the Karma Network is create a road show of forced marriage survivors to tell their stories to a public audience. This speaking circuit, which travelled to twelve different cities from June to July 2010, has a goal to share the work of Karma Nirvana with the community, educators, health care providers and other professionals that victims of forced marriage may go to for help. They also educate on the Forced Marriage Act in reference with the special treatment of child victims of FM; ten percent of Karma Nirvana’s callers are under the age of sixteen and “forty percent of FMU repatriated cases of victims are under the age of 16.”<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Karma Nirvana, “Honour Network,” Karma Nirvana, <http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/honour-network> (accessed January 5, 2011).

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Karma Nirvana, “Roadshows,” Karma Nirvana, <http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/events/roadshows> (accessed January 11, 2011).

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.



The road show also intends to dispel the aura of perceived racism that co-exists for many people when it comes to the issue of forced marriage. Many people feel that forced marriage is a “cultural issue,” but Sanghera states “it’s not part of my culture to be abused by anybody.”<sup>171</sup> By providing information and support, Sanghera’s work encourages women to live in the modern world of consent and shed cultural expectations of who they must marry to keep the family’s honor. “Ethnicism, while claiming to recognize ‘ethnic’ cultures, had...consolidated the notion that all struggles within the family were a result of ‘western influence’ or because Asian girls wanted to be ‘like English girls.’”<sup>172</sup> Sanghera posits that Asian women, like all women, want to be free to choose their spouses. By speaking out against the misguided cultural practice, British Muslim women use the freedom of speech their government provides them. This suggests that British Muslim women are embracing British liberal democracy.

Emphasizing to Asians and non-Asians that culture and abuse are not intrinsically linked, Sanghera promotes modern marriage expectations. A lot of her work has to deal with dispelling the myth of this perceived traditional cultural expectation. “[Non-Asians] are saying ‘we have to be sensitive and not criticize other cultures’ but in doing that they are allowing violations of women’s human rights to continue.”<sup>173</sup> Both action and inaction toward forced marriages have been seen as racist because this arrangement gets confounded with the actual cultural practices of arranged marriage. When this happens, “it becomes harder to address abuses of women without simultaneously promoting stereotypes of culture,” Sanghera states.<sup>174</sup> “The problem is that we become culturally sensitive and believe it is an issue we have to be politically correct about. That’s absolute rubbish.”<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Video link, Rebecca Seal and Eva Wiseman, “Abducted. Abused. Raped. Survived. British Asian Women Are Being Pushed by Their Families Into Forced Marriages, Unprotected by the Authorities.,” *Guardian (London)*, January 11, 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/11/british-asian-forced-marriages/print> (accessed January 7, 2011).

<sup>172</sup> Wilson, “The Forced Marriage Debate and the British State,” 2007, 30.

<sup>173</sup> Dustin and Phillips, “Whose Agenda Is It?” 2008, 408.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 408-409.

<sup>175</sup> BBC News, “Schools Warned On Forced Marriage,” BBC News, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk\\_news/england/bradford/8375456.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/england/bradford/8375456.stm) (accessed February 1, 2011).

By advertising her services, writing books and holding a road show, Sanghera has been able to help Asians and non-Asians realize the difference between traditional cultural expectations and abuse. She has become a shining example of how women have put liberal democratic values into action. Like the Southall Black Sisters, Sanghera's network has helped incorporate victims back into modern society and shed the traditional expectations of forced marriage.

## **2. Victim Advocacy and the Southall Black Sisters**

“Secular-minded Muslim women have organized as part of the wider movement against women's inequality;” the widely recognized group, the Southall Black Sisters (SBS), have campaigned to assist women who were victims of forced marriage and abusive relationships.<sup>176</sup> Founded in 1979 to assist Asian and African-Caribbean (these two groups are referred to as “Black”), the SBS have been at the forefront of identity negotiation in relation to domestic violence and forced marriage. SBS was the first organization to assist women escaping situations they were in due to traditional cultural pressures. The group holds to the premise that cultural relativity does not apply in the cases of domestic violence and forced marriage. Like Sanghera, they have to educate non-Asians who have been afraid of being called racist when discussing forced marriage. SBS encourages women to use their services, which include counseling, court assistance and other means of support, to integrate back into the modern British society.

The SBS also had an important role in educating the government on how to crack down on forced marriage by seeing the problem from a different, closer, perspective. Their recommendation to take a whole-community approach to forced marriage was well-received by the FCO, which published a handbook for all dimensions of forced marriage entitled “Multi-agency practice guidelines: Handling cases of Forced Marriage.” This shows that the SBS has been critical in educating the government's policy on an issue that has been considered a traditional cultural practice. This group of women is a prime example of how British Muslim women are fighting stereotypes by using British liberal democratic ideologies.

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<sup>176</sup> Humayun Ansari, “Muslims in Europe” (Minority Rights Group International, 2002), 1–39.

One of the main issues fought by women's NGOs, such as the SBS, is the British "two-year rule." This law requires any spouse who comes from another country to remain married to her British partner for two years before she can apply for the right to permanently remain in Britain. If she leaves the marriage before two years are over, she must return to her country of origin. One of the major problems with this rule is that before two years are over, immigrant women have no recourse to public funds or services, which means that they either have to be supported by their partners or work themselves. This means that immigrant women who are housewives have no access to funds if they leave home. One exception to the two-year rule is a provision for victims of domestic violence. Since 1999, a woman can apply for "Indefinite Leave to Remain" under the Domestic Violence Rule. In order to get approval to remain in Britain, a woman must prove that her marriage ended due to domestic violence. The SBS achieved a victory in November 2002, when the British government "as a result of pressure from [SBS], widened the type of evidence that was acceptable [to prove domestic violence]."<sup>177</sup> This was a huge victory for immigrant women's rights in Britain. Women no longer had to choose between victimization and deportation. By fighting this policy through legal battles, the SBS have improved the conditions for immigrant women in Britain. This struggle by the SBS strongly suggests that British Muslim women are embracing British values and liberal democratic ideologies.

#### **E. WHY ARE WOMEN FIGHTING FORCED MARRIAGE?**

It may seem obvious why a woman would not want to be in a forced marriage—she wants to have a say in her own destiny. Women who live in repressive societies do not get this choice. However, women in Britain are able to espouse the freedoms that their liberal democracy provides. They are able to move in between their perceived ethnic/cultural/religious expectations and British expectations. By embodying diverse identities, British Muslim women are able to challenge traditions that do not comply with British values.

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<sup>177</sup> Southall Black Sisters., "Campaigns," Southall Black Sisters, [http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/campaign\\_oneyearrule.html](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/campaign_oneyearrule.html) (accessed January 19, 2011).

Sanghera and groups like the SBS challenge what it means to be a Muslim woman. They fight for the freedoms that Britain promises all of its citizens. By creating the non-profit Honour Network, Sanghera put her money and efforts into a cause she believed in. She did not allow women to silently suffer; she believes that the world should be exposed to this tragedy. This is why Sanghera embodies the British liberal democratic ideology. She, like many other women, has suffered the threat of forced marriage. However, because she was able to use the British government to help her get out of a seemingly no-win situation, she was able to live a life that she chose. By working with the government, Sanghera challenged her cultural upbringing and embraced British liberal democratic values.

The SBS advocate for the end of forced marriage and the equal treatment of “Black” women. It is this struggle that make them champions for equal rights, a value of liberal democracy. Working for women’s rights specifically is an especially hot topic in modern liberal democracy. In Britain, feminists pushed for equal rights, and it can be argued that women are well-off socially and economically in the twenty-first century. However, only certain women experience the benefits of this feminism. Minority women in Britain often get fewer opportunities in society than their non-minority counterparts.<sup>178</sup> In this case, many Muslim (and Asian) women are expected to have a forced marriage, which leaves no room for the freedoms their British (white) counterparts’ experience. The work the SBS does to promote women’s rights and equality in marriage shows that British Muslim women have embraced the feminist ideals that the rest of British society takes for granted. Far from rejecting British society, as some scholars have suggested, British Muslim women are changing their cultural expectations to match those of the dominant society.

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<sup>178</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission, “How Fair Is Britain? Equality, Human Rights and Good Relations in 2010: The First Triennial Review” (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010), 403, 428. British minority women are less likely to have employment or choice in the workforce. Financial security, linked to employment, provides a person with more lifestyle options than poverty or relying on a spouse for income.

## F. CONCLUSION

Immigrant women in Britain are victims of forced marriage, while their family members are perpetuating the cycle in the name of culture. Separating the true culture from the implied culture (which may include forced marriage) in immigrant communities is a must. When immigrant communities stop using “culture” as a means of justifying crimes against women, Britain will become a more cohesive society, yet remain country with many cultures.

British polices are not perfect, but the government continues to move toward justice. Although British forced marriage legislation was not a top priority until the late-1990’s, the government’s policies have protected and saved many women from forced marriage. The Forced Marriage Act and Forced Marriage Unit are the government’s way of reacting toward the plight of forced marriage. NGOs run by Jasvinder Sanghera and the Southall Black Sisters have used their cultural identities as minorities (and in Sanghera’s case, as a victim) to speak out for victims of forced marriage. Both the government and NGO’s shed light on the criminality and hurt of forced marriage through education and information. By exposing forced marriage as a crime against women, the British government and NGOs have created a safe space for Asian women to express their traditions of arranged marriage in a modern society without worrying about the aspect of coercion. The hope is that one day Asian women (and all women) will be unencumbered by the prospect of forced marriage, as it is not part of a true cultural identity.

Although there is a long way to go to end the plight of forced marriage, the fact that so many women are calling for help is a positive sign; they realize that what they are going through is not right and might not carry on this “tradition” to their daughters. Feminist scholars are hopeful that the practice of forced marriage is fading out; “older generations saw transcontinental marriage as cultural rejuvenation but increasingly recognized that arranged marriages without the full consent of their children were risky and unlikely to last.”<sup>179</sup> Both NGO’s and the British government must continue to

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<sup>179</sup> Sherene Razack, “Imperilled Muslim Women, Dangerous Muslim Men and Civilised Europeans: Legal and Social Responses to Forced Marriages,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 12 (2004): 165.

advocate for and assist women who are victims of forced marriage. Another important part in the campaign to end forced marriage must be continued training and education for the British public, both immigrant and non-immigrant. If the government and NGOs put out a story that forced marriage is not a true cultural practice, perhaps the feelings of racism and media dramatization will give way to the real issue; each year, thousands of women and girls in Britain are forced to marry men whom they did not choose because of family pressure. It seems hopeful that if forced marriage is continuously put in a bad light based on individual practices (not cultural), that people who once considered it for their families may start to see it as a violation of human rights.

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## IV. LET ME IN: THE MOSQUE AND WOMEN

Given the importance of mosques to the formation of Islamic identities and communities, it is not unsurprising, therefore, to find that they become sites of negotiation for Muslim women seeking to assert their agency, identity and rights.<sup>180</sup>

### A. INTRODUCTION

As the Islamic place of worship, the mosque is central to a person's identity as a Muslim. The self-proclaimed Islamic "counter-extremism think tank," Quilliam, admits that "mosques form the bedrock of British Muslim communities."<sup>181</sup> These buildings serve as much more than a place to pray five times a day; British mosques often act as community centers, counseling offices and educational facilities for children (*madrasas*) and adults (through Qur'an classes). With eighty-six percent of Muslims stating that "my religion is the most important thing in my life," exclusion from the mosque causes strife internal to the Muslim community.<sup>182</sup>

One of the biggest issues in British mosques is the access to (or lack thereof) mosques for women. Gender segregation remains rampant in the private lives of Muslims in the British liberal democracy. Muslim women feel that they do not get fair and equal access to the house of prayer. This directly conflicts with the British value of gender equality, which ensures women have fair access to services. If women are not allowed to enter a mosque to pray, they are not afforded the same rights as men, and this type of overt gender discrimination is not acceptable in Britain. British Muslim women understand that they should have the same rights as men. Their fight to enter mosques proves that they are changing their religious culture with British values.

Why are British Muslim women pushing for female friendly mosques? This chapter explores how and why British Muslim women are pushing for more access to

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<sup>180</sup> Brown, "The Promise and Perils of Women's Participation in UK Mosques," 2008, 474.

<sup>181</sup> Anya Hart Dyke, "Mosques Made in Britain" (Quilliam Foundation, 2009), 2-7.

<sup>182</sup> Munira Mirza, Abi Senthilkumaran and Zein Ja'far, "Living Apart Together: British Muslims and the Paradox of Multiculturalism," *Policy Exchange* (2007): 5.



mosques, and why this issue is also relevant to the British government. The mosque is the ultimate locale for British Muslim women to create their group identity. However, women's religious needs in British Islam are frequently looked over; only fifty-four percent of mosques offer prayer space for women.<sup>183</sup> This issue finds relevance to Muslim women's identities because "public expressions of faith are central to many Muslim women's rights campaigns and political activism, but only forty percent of UK mosques currently have provisions for female worshippers."<sup>184</sup> The lack of women in British mosques plays a large role in the call for mosque reformation not only by the women who seek entry, but also by the British government.

In a liberal democracy, women should have equal access to all public facilities. The 1975 Sex Discrimination Act "outlaws discrimination on the basis of sex in employment, training and the provision of goods and services."<sup>185</sup> Though this principle may not directly apply to mosques (as they are private and not controlled by the British state), it strongly suggests that that British Muslim women are espousing the principles behind this act, as the mosque is a place of religious "training."

## **B. BACKGROUND**

Britain's Muslim population is large; there were an estimated two million Muslims in Britain in 2008, and Muslims account for approximately three percent of the population of the UK.<sup>186</sup> The fastest growing religious group in Britain needs a place to worship, and indeed there are an estimated 1,689 mosques in the country.<sup>187</sup>

Women are not included in many mosques in Britain. In a 2009 Charity Commission Survey of Mosques, sixty-one percent of mosques offered "women's

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<sup>183</sup> Anya Hart Dyke, "Mosques Made in Britain" (Quilliam Foundation, 2009), 20.

<sup>184</sup> Brown, "The Promise and Perils of Women's Participation in UK Mosques," 2008, 474.

<sup>185</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission., "How Fair Is Britain? Equality, Human Rights and Good Relations in 2010: The First Triennial Review" (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010), 21.

<sup>186</sup> Alan Travis, "Officials Think UK's Muslim Population Has Risen to 2m," *Guardian* (London), April 8, 2008. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/08/population.islam> (accessed March 2, 2011).

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*; Ruth Gledhill, "Thousands of Churches Face Closure in Ten Years," *Times* (London), February 10, 2007. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article1362709.ece> (accessed March 2, 2011).

groups/activities,” with larger mosques more likely to cater to women.<sup>188</sup> This same survey showed that women are more likely to go to a larger mosque (sixty-one percent of mosques that serve 500 worshippers have women as part of the congregation) versus a smaller mosque (forty-four percent of mosques that serve less than 200 worshippers have women as part of the congregation).<sup>189</sup> Only fifteen percent of mosques report having women on the trustee group (with women making up only one percent of mosque trustees in Britain), while over ninety-nine percent of mosques include men in this function.<sup>190</sup> The disparity of women on the decision-making bodies of mosques shows that women are not yet fully integrated into the religious hierarchy yet, but the progress that mosques are making through provision of services shows hope.

Although discussions regarding women in the mosque occurred in the past, the London bombings on July 7, 2005, brought this issue (and many other issues dealing with Islam and Muslims) to light. For the British government, the drive to incorporate women in the mosques comes from an apparent need for security. Women “are seen as the ‘missing link’ in counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization projects.”<sup>191</sup> Although this paper will explore whether or not that is a correct assessment later, it is glaringly obvious that the perception of women as civilizing and liberalizing effects proves that mosques need women as much as women need the mosques.<sup>192</sup>

“For the government, British Muslim women are witnesses to a moderate and liberal Islam, and are through their daily lives engaged with issues of rights and ‘Britishness.’”<sup>193</sup> Women, due to their nature, are seen by the British government as gatekeepers to a moderate, peaceful Islam. Although this is not always the case, the British government has pinned the inclusion of women in mosques to moderate Islamic

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188 Charity Commission, “Survey of Mosques in England and Wales” (BMG Research, 2009), 16, [http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Library/about\\_us/fscumosque.pdf](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Library/about_us/fscumosque.pdf) (accessed March 2, 2011)

189 Ibid., 10.

190 Ibid., 3.

191 Brown, “The Promise and Perils of Women’s Participation in UK Mosques,” 2008, 474.

192 Ibid., 472.

193 Ibid., 481.

practices. The thinking is that if moderate women join a mosque and have their opinions heard extremism could be combated from within a congregation.

## **C. HOW ARE WOMEN PUSHING FOR THEIR PLACE**

### **1. Muslim Public Affairs Council United Kingdom**

In 2006, *Dispatches*, a British news program, covered the topic of women fighting to get into mosques around the country. The group of women featured was part of the Muslim Public Affairs Council United Kingdom (MPACUK), whose goal is to “empower Muslims to fulfill our Islamic duty to strive for justice.”<sup>194</sup> The episode was entitled “Women-Only Jihad,” and documented the struggles of MPACUK’s women as they tried to gain entry in male-only mosques. The host of the program, Tazeen Ahmad, a British Asian woman, believed that allowing women into mosques will “allow British Muslim women to define their own roles.”<sup>195</sup>

The women in the video seem to be between twenty years old and forty years old. Some wear the hijab, some wear the niqab and some choose to wear no head covering (although all of the women cover their heads to enter mosque).

The women of MPACUK used democratic tactics to promote their cause. The first (filmed) attempt of the women to enter a mosque took place at the Balfour Road mosque prior to Friday prayers. The women knew that there were over six-hundred spaces for men at the mosque, so they asked to speak to a committee member about where they could pray. After being shooed away by members of the congregation, the women spoke to the committee member, who told them “we don’t have a space for the woman” (sic) and then slammed the mosque door in their faces.<sup>196</sup> Whereas the women were peacefully asking to pray somewhere in the mosque, they were met with shouting

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<sup>194</sup> Muslim Public Affairs Council of the United Kingdom, “About MPACUK,” Muslim Public Affairs Council of the United Kingdom, <http://www.mpacuk.org/about-mpacuk.html> (accessed March 2, 2011).

<sup>195</sup> Channel 4 (UK), “Dispatches: Women-Only Jihad,” Google, AVI file, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3046570183637153703#> (accessed February 10, 2011).

<sup>196</sup> The majority of this paragraph refers to Channel 4 (UK), “Dispatches: Women-Only Jihad,” Google, AVI file, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3046570183637153703#> (accessed February 10, 2011).

and a mild amount of anger. It is also interesting to watch how the men at mosque would react to the women attempting entry; many men shooed the women away and told them to cover their faces. Young men and old men alike denied the women even a chance to speak with the councils or imams.

The next attempt the women made at the same mosque to gain entrance used a tactic that appealed to the patriarchal system of the mosque. The women hoped that the male committee members would respect what male members of MPACUK had to say about allowing women to pray in the mosque. MPACUK's male members were instructed by the women to ask what the mosque was doing to allow women to pray there. A senior member of the committee responded to the men he was born in the 1950's and have never seen a woman in the mosque here or in Pakistan.<sup>197</sup> The men summarized that the council held over beliefs from when they lived in Pakistan; "we have the same... Islam [as we did in Pakistan] and we're going to do everything we did in Pakistan... here."<sup>198</sup> This excuse reveals the man's fear of change; because he was a committee member for the mosque, it is assumed that this attitude is widespread throughout the mosque.

The third time the MPACUK women go to mosque; they try to pass out flyers after Friday prayers at Milland Street mosque which advocate the place of women in mosques. As they ask Muslim men to take a flyer and support women's entry into the mosque, they are met with violence. It is obvious that some of the men do not like the female presence or what the females are asking; some men pushed away the flyers and one man told the women that "you're not supposed to show your face to the man."<sup>199</sup> The film crew is asked repeatedly to stop recording and move their filming across the street. After a few minutes of angry yelling, a mosque elder tells the women "they'll never listen to you, you should go." Annika Waheed, an MPAUCK activist, believes that these men would never treat their sisters or wives like this, but they feel that it is okay to

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<sup>197</sup> "Channel 4 (UK), "Dispatches: Women-Only Jihad," Google, AVI file, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3046570183637153703#> (accessed February 10, 2011).

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

treat women like this at mosque. She then states that if her father was present, he would not let men treat her poorly. This statement embodies the gender separation that is so engrained in British mosques.

After the clash, the Ahmad met with the Lancashire Council of Mosques (LCM), the “umbrella organization representing all the mosques...in Lancashire” whose purpose is to “provide a united and uniform platform in order to promote the needs and aspirations of the county’s Muslim community.”<sup>200</sup> Abdul Hamid Qureshi, then chairman of LCM stated that it is not the policy of the LCM to deny women access to mosques. He realizes that “there are certain individuals who take up different stance than overall policy of mosque” and do not allow women inside the mosque.<sup>201</sup> It seemed promising when he told Ahmad that “[LCM] will make a provision for them to pray in the mosque the time they want to pray,” and assured her “it will not be just a gesture of public relations.”<sup>202</sup> This statement showed that the LCM was aware that women wanted access to the mosque, and that LCM was highly concerned for these women. The meeting with MPACUK’s women to discuss the details, however, did not show the same thing.

When the Lancashire Council of Mosques (LCM) met with MPACUK, the arguing continued in a similar manner as it did outside of Milland Street mosque. The LCM president asked why MPACUK needed to have women as a part of the committees of the mosque or even president of the mosque, to which the women replied “why not?”<sup>203</sup> While the council continued to think that women do not need a place at the decision-making table, they did offer the women a place to pray at the Milland Street mosque. However, as the women arrived for their Friday prayers, they were escorted to a side building about a block away from the main mosque. The conditions inside the

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<sup>200</sup> Lancashire Council of Mosques, “About Us,” Lancashire Council of Mosques, [http://www.lancashiremosques.com/about\\_us.asp](http://www.lancashiremosques.com/about_us.asp) (accessed March 2, 2011).

<sup>201</sup> “Channel 4 (UK), “Dispatches: Women-Only Jihad,” Google, AVI file, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3046570183637153703#> (accessed February 10, 2011).

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

building were, according to Waheed “it’s a dump, it smells, it’s dirty... the whole point of ablution is to be clean when you pray, so if you’re clean, how can you go into a place that isn’t clean and pray?”<sup>204</sup>

Using another democratic tactic, the women appealed to the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), an organization which claims to “[encourage] individual Muslims and Muslim organisations to play a full and participatory role in public life.”<sup>205</sup> During the meeting, the women were encouraged to make friends with the imam’s wife at each mosque in order to gain access to that mosque. The MCB suggested that going through other women (instead of the man who has the power and influence) would be the best way to get into the mosque. This highly patriarchal view shows that, in the MCB’s eyes, women are not equal; an organization which allegedly promotes Muslim rights will not stand up for half of the people it serves.

It was also noted that British Muslim women may have a unique benefit of living in a liberal democracy: “This kind of campaign could only happen here in the West, with its democratic traditions. Most Muslim countries would never tolerate such a public challenge to the authority of the mosque.”<sup>206</sup> This point is important, as it highlights the freedoms allotted in a liberal democracy vice an authoritarian government with strong religious ties. People living in have certain expectations of rights and many British Muslim women feel that gender should not stand in the way of these rights.

## **2. The List: How Are These Mosques Female-Friendly? What Are Their Criteria?**

There are many mosques that provide prayer services and other needs for women. These mosques received recognition for their work to include women. In February 2010, a booklet entitled “Developing Diversity” with a subtitle of “Meeting the Needs of

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<sup>204</sup> Channel 4 (UK), “Dispatches: Women-Only Jihad,” Google, AVI file, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3046570183637153703#> (accessed February 10, 2011). Ablution is the ritual practice of washing hands and feet before praying.

<sup>205</sup> Muslim Council of Britain, “About Us,” Muslim Council of Britain, <http://www.mcb.org.uk/aboutmcb.php> (accessed March 2, 2011).

<sup>206</sup> “Channel 4 (UK), “Dispatches: Women-Only Jihad,” Google, AVI file, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3046570183637153703#> (accessed February 10, 2011).

Muslim Women: A Directory of Mosques in England” by faithmatters.org was published. This document is a directory of the 100 mosques in England which met the criteria of over 100 women in eight multi-ethnic Muslim focus groups agreed were the most important for their religious needs. The criteria used to determine the “women-friendliness” of a mosque were:

- A separate prayer space for women,
- Services and activities geared towards women (i.e., childcare and or women’s training or mentoring sessions),
- An Imam accessible to women (or a female scholar),
- The inclusion of women in decision making,
- Women holding office on the mosque committees<sup>207</sup>

Whereas the mosques featured in this booklet are promoted as bastions of equality, a deeper look proves that it is difficult to determine if this is indeed true. The criteria are insufficient to determine if the mosques are truly inclusive. The wording of each of the five points is very general.

These criteria are a good place to start for women’s inclusion, but they are basic and do not even graze the surface of addressing equality in British mosques. The criterion of “separate prayer spaces for women” infers two things: (1) women and men never pray together in Islam; (2) these spaces are adequate for women’s prayer. The former point will be discussed see how this notion is challenged in another liberal democracy. This criterion falls short to fully address the needs of Muslim women, as it does not detail how many worshippers it must hold, nor does it state that the conditions in the space must be similar to those experienced by the men’s prayer area. Ed Hussein

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<sup>207</sup>Faith Matters, *Developing Diversity: Meeting the Needs of Muslim Women: a Directory of Mosques in England: Promoting Excellence and Providing Choice* (London: Faith Matters, 2010), 12. Seventy-nine percent of large mosques (with a congregation of over 500) in Britain offer “women’s groups/activities.”

points out in a 2009 article for *The Times* (London), that mosques which have a place for women to pray “provide disgraceful, unhygienic quarters... and ensure women maintain no real presence at mosques.”<sup>208</sup>

Once again, the criterion of “services and activities geared toward women” is extremely vague. This criterion for women’s inclusion covers a variety of things, from “activities for young girls- exercise, health and educational classes” at Faizan-e-Madina mosque in Peterborough to “educational sessions, women’s study circles and cooking classes” at Masjid and Madrasah Al-Tawhid in London. Because “services and activities” is such a broad term, mosques can fit the bill through a variety of activities and services which may or may not be inclusive of women.

The criterion of having “an imam or female scholar available” for women is noble. Women believe that mosques and the imams should help deal with family problems, but there are few, if any female scholars or religious leaders to whom a woman can turn in her time of need. Issues such as domestic violence and forced marriage are rarely dealt with by the mosque or imam; women usually turn to Asian women’s groups or Muslim women’s groups if they speak to anyone about a personal situation.<sup>209</sup> Despite culture or religion, it is important for women to have a female to turn to for guidance and support. This is why it is important for Muslim women to have a real voice in the mosque; the more representation of women in mosque leadership, the more women can feel at ease and share their problems (and joys). However, like the other criteria on the list, each mosque can interpret what makes up a female scholar or an imam available to women. There are not any female imams in Britain, so women must either speak with a male imam or, if her mosque is so inclined to hire one, a female scholar.<sup>210</sup>

The criteria of “inclusion of women in decision making” and “women holding office on the mosque committees” is open to interpretation; some of the mosques that

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<sup>208</sup> Ed Husain, “How Britain’s Mosques Foster Extremism; Sectarian, Conservative Leadership Is Driving Confused Young Muslims Into the Arms of Radicals,” *Times* (London), February 24, 2009.

<sup>209</sup> “Channel 4 (UK), “Dispatches: Women-Only Jihad,” Google, AVI file, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3046570183637153703#> (accessed February 10, 2011).

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. Though there are no female imams in Britain, female Quranic scholars have the same training as imams, without the title or recognition as an imam.



have “fulfilled” this criteria have a woman’s subcommittee to the executive committee, and do not actually have women as part of the main decision-making body of the council. Because Islam has no overarching authority (like a Catholic Pope and it’s substructure), each mosque decides its own sermons, events and messages for its worshippers. Along with the imams, the mosque committee, as either an elected or appointed body, decides the direction of the mosque. Women rarely serve on mosque committees; however, having a female influence on the committee would give a voice to the other half of the Muslim community that it serves.

Those mosques that do have women on the executive committee generally had one or two women, and the data did not show how large the committees were. This makes me skeptical of if women are truly included or they are placeholders on the mosque committees, so a mosque can say that it includes women in decision-making processes.

Overall, this list provides a twofold purpose: (1) it highlights the mosques that are attempting inclusion; (2) its brevity and vagueness show that there is still a wide gap between men and women inside the mosque. Another pitfall of using this list to showcase mosque equality is the fact that out of the approximately 1689 mosques in Britain, only fifty can claim to meet all five of these criteria (and another fifty meet four of the criteria). This means that the overwhelming majority of mosques in Britain do not provide many services that women need from their place of worship (if they even offer services to women at all).

### **3. Finsbury Park Mosque—Transformation Through Gender**

Mosques seen as security threats, government reports have marked mosques as potential breeding grounds for terrorist/extremist activities.<sup>211</sup> Perhaps the most infamous mosque in London, Finsbury Park, was connected to Sheikh Abu Hamza. Hamza created controversy after his inflammatory speech praising the September 11<sup>th</sup> hijackers in

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<sup>211</sup> Brown, “The Promise and Perils of Women’s Participation in UK,” 2008, 472–91.

2002.<sup>212</sup> Hamza's hateful speech promoted killing *kafir* (non-believers) "even if there is no reason for it."<sup>213</sup> Hamza used the mosque as "a recruiting ground for terrorists" and preached to men who would later become the 7/7 and 7/21 bombers, along with "shoe bomber" Richard Reid and six other suspected terrorists.<sup>214</sup> The Egyptian-born, English and Arabic-speaking Hamza "seemed like a godsend" until he "physically took over the Mosque and turned it into a safe haven for extremists."<sup>215</sup>

Before the mosque was raided by British police in 2003, Hamza was suspended as an imam by the Charity Commission.<sup>216</sup> Hamza was arrested in 2004, but the mosque's reputation was already tarnished. The leaders of the mosque desired to "turn [the mosque] into a center for the promotion of moderate Islam and community integration."<sup>217</sup> Finsbury Park changed its name to North London Central Mosque (NLCM) and began a slew of change; the integration of women in NLCM is very inclusive. Women are highly valued members of this mosque. There are prayer rooms and meeting halls along with a "full schedule of programs for women" according to a government assessment on the mosque in 2007.<sup>218</sup> This shows how important women are to changing the face of the mosque. NLCM needed to change its reputation, so it became inclusive of all Muslims and rejected its extremist past. By allowing women to

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<sup>212</sup> BBC News, "Profile: Abu Hamza," BBC News, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11701269> (accessed March 2, 2011). Men who attempted the London bombings July 21, 2005 stated that they had heard Hamza speak at the mosque "on a number of occasions."

<sup>213</sup> The Independent, "The Finsbury Park Network; Abu Hamza Verdict," *Independent (London)*, February 8, 2006. David Williams and Ben Taylor, "Hamza's web of terror," *Daily Mail (London)*, February 8, 2006.

<sup>214</sup> The Independent, "The Finsbury Park Network; Abu Hamza Verdict," *Independent (London)*, February 8, 2006. David Williams and Ben Taylor, "Hamza's web of terror," *Daily Mail (London)*, February 8, 2006.

<sup>215</sup> US Embassy London, "Finsbury Park Mosque- After the Storm," *Telegraph (London)*, February 3, 2011. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/wikileaks-files/uk-terrorism-wikileaks/8302240/FINSBURY-PARK-MOSQUE-AFTER-THE-STORM.html> (accessed March 2, 2011). Note: this article was a wiki-leaked document.

<sup>216</sup> United Kingdom Government News, "Abu Hamza Suspended from North London Central Mosque," United Kingdom Government News, [http://www.gov-news.org/gov/uk/news/abu\\_hamza\\_suspended\\_from\\_north\\_london\\_central/85364.html](http://www.gov-news.org/gov/uk/news/abu_hamza_suspended_from_north_london_central/85364.html) (accessed March 2, 2011).

<sup>217</sup> U.S. Embassy London, "Finsbury Park Mosque- After the Storm," 2011.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

“develop programs” for the mosque and participate in fund-raising, the mosque is embracing contemporary British values, something that did not exist in the mosque four years prior.<sup>219</sup> Although the presence of women is not the only reason for the mosque’s turnaround, it does play a large part in its strategy to ward off extremism. The mosque values British Muslim women who are embracing British values.

#### **4. True Equality? A Brief Comparison with the United States.**

##### ***a. Side-by-Side Prayer***

American Muslim women are dealing with issues of gender equality in the mosque, as well. However, instead of worrying about entrance to the mosque (like their British sisters), American women are fighting for the right to pray beside their Muslim brothers.

[Sit-ins are] orchestrated by a group of Muslim women wanting to end gender segregation in nearly two-thirds of American mosques. To get their point across, some of these women are literally walking out from behind the seven-foot barrier separating men and women in some mosques to pray side-by-side with men.<sup>220</sup>

This is to fight the “cultural practice” of Islam that provides extreme protection \for women and provide barriers for them.

##### ***b. Female Imams***

A leader of one of the groups executing the pray-ins is Pamela Thompson, a Muslim convert. A Muslim convert, Thompson fights for a range of women’s inclusion

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<sup>219</sup> U.S. Embassy London, “Finsbury Park Mosque- After the Storm,”2011.

<sup>220</sup> Jehan S. Harney, “The Battle of the Sexes in US Mosques,” The Huffington Post, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jehan-s-harney/can-mosque-pray-ins-chang\\_b\\_615313.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jehan-s-harney/can-mosque-pray-ins-chang_b_615313.html) (accessed February 27, 2011).

in the mosque. As an imam, Thompson leads integrated Eid al-Adha prayers in 2010.<sup>221</sup> As a co-founder of Muslims for Progressive Values, Thompson believes that congregations should be fully prayer services should be fully integrated; “by segregating [men and women during prayer], you sexualize the area in ways that it wouldn’t be sexualized if the area was mixed,” she believes.<sup>222</sup> Thompson, a graduate of Harvard’s Divinity School, believes that women are able to lead mixed congregations in prayer and serve as imams, quoting *hadith* (narrations regarding Mohammed’s words and deeds) to prove her point.<sup>223</sup>

The phenomenon of women leading a mixed-congregation prayer is still rare in the U.S.; however, Islamic feminist scholar Amina Wadud led a congregation of over 100 men and women in Friday prayers in 2005. Though she received death threats for leading the service, she was hopeful that this event was “symbolic of the possibilities for Islam.”<sup>224</sup> Wadud claims that she was not the first woman to lead mixed-congregation prayer, but the first woman publicized doing it. She also claims that ““there is no *ayat* in the Quran, no *hadith*, or *sunnah* which prohibits a woman from leading a prayer.””<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Colin, “Female Imam Leads Eid Prayer,” Inside Islam: Dialogues and Debates, <http://insideislam.wisc.edu/index.php/archives/5621> (accessed February 23, 2011).; Pamela Taylor, “Can a Muslim Woman Lead Prayer Services?” *Washington Post*, November 9, 2010. [http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/modernmuslim/2010/11/women\\_in\\_the\\_minbar.html#more](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/modernmuslim/2010/11/women_in_the_minbar.html#more) (accessed March 1, 2011); “At the end of the Hajj (annual pilgrimage to Mecca), Muslims throughout the world celebrate the holiday of Eid al-Adha (*Festival of Sacrifice*). During the Hajj, Muslims remember and commemorate the trials and triumphs of the Prophet Abraham.” Huda, “Eid Al-Adha,” About.com, <http://islam.about.com/od/hajj/a/adha.htm> (accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Muslims for Progressive Values, “Women as Imams,” Muslims for Progressive Values, [http://www.mpvusa.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=143:women-as-imams&catid=40:womens-rights&Itemid=56](http://www.mpvusa.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=143:women-as-imams&catid=40:womens-rights&Itemid=56) (accessed March 1, 2011). to read all of Thompsons’ hadith interpretations.

<sup>224</sup> BBC News, “Woman Leads Us Muslims to Prayer,” BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4361931.stm> (accessed February 20, 2011); Wadud has also lead the first mixed-congregation Friday prayers in Spain (2005) and the UK (2008: Riazat Butt and Niki Nixon, “National: Us Academic First Woman to Lead Muslim Prayers in Uk,” *Guardian (London)*, October 18, 2008.

<sup>225</sup> Siti Nurbaiyah Nadzmi, “No Question About Her Conviction,” BNet, [http://findarticles.com/p/news-articles/new-straits-times/mi\\_8016/is\\_20090217/question-conviction/ai\\_n44431783/](http://findarticles.com/p/news-articles/new-straits-times/mi_8016/is_20090217/question-conviction/ai_n44431783/) (accessed February 27, 2011).

#### D. WHY ARE THERE ROADBLOCKS?

There are two schools of thought as to why women have to fight for gender equality in their place of worship. The first, spoken by men on the Dispatches program, was men want to keep their last bastion of male dominance. Women are distracting to the worshipping men, and they are not required to go to mosque. The second theory is that due to its lack of centralization, Islam is being interpreted and practiced in a subjective way; cultural, not religious, biases are used to determine whether a woman has a place in the mosque.

The first theory is supported by the fact that many of Britain's imams are brought in from Pakistan and other parts of South Asia, and may not have experience with gender equality that exists in a liberal democracy like Britain. A survey by Quilliam showed that out of 254 mosques polled, ninety-seven percent of the imams were born outside of Britain and out of 152 mosques, and ninety-two percent of imams were trained outside of Britain.<sup>226</sup> "If born and trained abroad 'imams may have imported chauvinistic attitudes and present them as Islamic,' further hindering the opening up of mosques to women."<sup>227</sup> If imams of male-only mosques bring gender-biases with them from their countries of birth and training, it will be even more difficult for women to enter those mosques. The video also displayed this theory, when an imam said that he was from Pakistan, and he had never seen a woman in a mosque in Pakistan or Britain.<sup>228</sup> He was used to women being excluded and had likely never thought of an alternative. An American imam (born in Africa) stated "I am living a tradition that is 1,400 years old; nothing is going to change from it" on a 2005 National Public Radio show regarding the status of women in the mosque.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Anya Hart Dyke, "Mosques Made in Britain" (Quilliam Foundation, 2009), 11. A more thorough survey reported by the London Times in 2005 stated that out of 2000 imams, 1700 (85%) were foreign-trained. Muslims in search for British imams to beat extremism

<sup>227</sup> Anya Hart Dyke, "Mosques Made in Britain" (Quilliam Foundation, 2009), 21.

<sup>228</sup> Channel 4 (UK), "Dispatches: Women-Only Jihad," Google, AVI file, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3046570183637153703#> (accessed February 10, 2011).

<sup>229</sup> Religion and Ethics News Weekly, "Cover Story: Women in Mosques," PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week811/cover.html> (accessed March 1, 2011).

The second theory is supported by evidence from the Quran, which used to explain and justify many things in Islam. In Britain, the Quran is used to justify excluding women from mosques. However, there is not a passage in the Quran or related Islamic texts that deny women the right to worship at a mosque. In fact, the opposite is true; a *hadith*, words from Mohammed, states “do not prevent women from going to mosques.”<sup>230</sup> There are more *hadiths* to the same effect, which shows that the original intent Mohammed and the Quran was to include women in the mosque and prayer services. However, a combination of these theories is the strongest argument of why this behavior exists in Britain. Women are seen as second-class citizens by men who never thought of an alternative to subjugation. The men brought their cultural bias, which does not stem from religious foundations, to the place of worship.

#### **E. WHY ARE WOMEN FIGHTING FOR REFORMS?**

Women fight for reforms because they are integrated into British society and embrace democratic principles. A democracy requires “a citizenry that is involved in and participates in political affairs.”<sup>231</sup> Involving themselves in a struggle based on gender is, by nature, gender politics. Therefore, British Muslim women are involved in a political struggle with the mosques. They are involved in changing the structure of the mosque and participate in protests and other means of peaceful change to reach their goals. Access to resources is the “single-most important ingredient” for “participation in the form of collective action.”<sup>232</sup> British Muslim women have an important resource that they can use in their fight to enter the mosque: the support of the British government.

A supporter of the women’s movement in mosques is the British government. It may seem an unlikely ally, but the government has its own reason for promoting equality in the mosque. The government’s role in encouraging women’s participation in mosques is directly linked to fighting extremism and potential radicalism in the mosque. The

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<sup>230</sup> Faith Matters, *Developing Diversity Meeting the Needs of Muslim Women a Directory of Mosques in England: Promoting Excellence and Providing Choice* (London: Faith Matters, 2010), 9.

<sup>231</sup> Robert Jackman, “Political Elites, Mass Publics, and Support For Democratic Principles,” *Journal of Politics* 34, no. 3 (August 1972): 754.

<sup>232</sup> Geriant Perry, George Moyser and Neil Day, *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1992), 226.

British government released a document with the telltale name “Working Together to Prevent Extremism,” in which a subsection is labeled “Engaging with Muslim Women.”<sup>233</sup> The presence of a chapter regarding women in this document proves that the British government feels that women are a crucial (and separate) element of combating extremism within the Muslim community. The document contains several suggestions of how to integrate British Muslim women by promoting education and exemplifying female Muslim role models for young women. In the chapter regarding “Imams/Mosques,” however, the report suggests that promoting mosques which have included women could “be used as a vehicle for disseminating and sharing good practices to mosques and imams in the UK.”<sup>234</sup> The fact that the government sees British Muslim women as influential in the war on terror means that women have integrated and taken on the social democratic values of British society.

Another democratic value that British Muslim women embody in their fight to enter the mosque is “respect for rights of minorities.”<sup>235</sup> In this case, they are the gender minority. They fight the men (majority) for equal rights, a value of a democratic society.

The final democratic principle British Muslim women assert is the principle of mobilization. By giving “peaceful and orderly opposition” to the mosque, they express their desires while abiding democratic values. Petitions, pray-ins and handing out pamphlets are all non-violent, yet effective, means for the women to get their message to the mosques.

These points strongly suggest that British Muslim women are fighting for equal rights within the mosque because they are imbued with British liberal democratic ideology; specifically, what is happening in is evidence of desired gender equality in the Western sense. By fighting for their rights through democratic means such as petitions, flyers and peaceful resistance, the women of MPACUK are embodying what it means to

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<sup>233</sup> HM Government., “Preventing Extremism Together: Working Groups August-October 2005” (Home Office, 2005).

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>235</sup> Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, “Modern Nondemocratic Regimes,” in *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, eds. Patrick H. O’Neil and Ronald Rogowski, (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004): 172.

be British in the political sense. They are actively participating in issues that affect them and encouraging others to do so. The women are living out the democratic ideal; they are changing their world with the strength of will and not force.

## **F. CONCLUSION**

Feminism's first major victory in Britain was the vote in 1918 (for women over thirty years old). British family life is moving decidedly towards equality; fifty-six percent of women in 1971 had jobs outside the home, whereas seventy percent of women in 2008 had jobs outside of the home.<sup>236</sup> Though there are likely financial factors that play into this statistic, the jump is significant. Even more telling of British gender equality are the attitudes of British men. In 1984, forty-three percent of men believed "A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family." In 2008, the percentage dropped to sixteen.<sup>237</sup> This shows that men and women are embracing the changing roles of gender in Britain. These facts strongly imply that British Muslim women are a part of this trend and are also embracing the shift in gender expectations in Britain.

Mosques are an increasingly important aspect of the Muslim identity, especially in secular Britain. British Muslim women want to connect with their religion through the place of worship, but are oftentimes excluded. By using democratic means, such as peaceful resistance, distributing flyers and approaching the mosque committees to reconcile women's entry, these women have embraced British liberal democracy. They have accepted Western feminist ideology that women should have an equal say in decision-making and during prayer. However, they must still fight the patriarchal attitudes that prevail in many mosques.

British Muslim women display Westernized feminism in a way that many western women do not; by challenging the imams and other Muslim men, they are breaking away

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<sup>236</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission., "How Fair Is Britain? Equality, Human Rights and Good Relations in 2010: The First Triennial Review" (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010), 27.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.



from the mold that is cast upon them as “weak.”<sup>238</sup> They are also showing that feminism is not dead. Minority women often fight against their men’s culturally-imbued beliefs, the last battle of feminism inside a liberal democracy. These women prove that it is possible to be both a modern British woman and a pious Muslim sister.

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<sup>238</sup> Eren, “Muslim Women in Europe: Oppressed by Religion or Politics?” Muslimah Media Watch, <http://muslimahmediawatch.org/2010/11/muslim-women-in-europe-oppressed-by-religion-or-politics/> (accessed March 3, 2011).

## V. CONCLUSION

### A. SUMMARY

This thesis began by asking how British Muslim women are negotiating between a traditional religion and modern British society; I found that British Muslim women are able to maintain a religious identity while taking on British values because they have the opportunity to express themselves freely. Through the lens of the hijab, the fight against forced marriage and the fight to gain entrance to the mosque, British Muslim women prove themselves to value their religion, while demanding modern social rights and identities. They have, in fact, created a new identity that is compatible with British society without losing religion. They are empowered by the freedoms offered by British law and culture. This empowerment enables British Muslim women to change their culture to enmesh with mainstream British society.

British Muslim women are modernizing the head scarf and making it their own. I showed how young British designers have transformed a traditional religious garment to a modern, stylish one. Using modern trappings, such as contemporary patterns, colors and designs, hijab and jilbab designers have brought Western style to an Eastern religion. They are visually creating a hybrid Muslim woman, one who enjoys Western fashion without giving up her religious convictions to cover. Creating an Islamic street wear style that attracts religious and non-religious women alike is a means of drawing a larger clientele and thus increase profits. Hijabistas sell their Islamic wear with Western flare and desire what all Western businesses desire: profits. Their incorporation in the capitalist system proves that British Muslim women want to be included in the British marketplace, which is an integrative characteristic. These women have used British values to integrate the Muslim dress into British culture. By adding Western aspects to Islamic clothing, British Muslim women are able to change their culture without losing their religion.

Another way British Muslim women prove themselves integrated in British society through the hijab is the range of sport and professional hijabs created for British

women. Capsters would not exist if there was no market for them; British Muslim women desired to be involved in sporting activities while remaining modest, so a sports-material hijab was created. This innovation was not only resulted from, but also enabled many women playing sports while maintaining religious modesty. Religious wear in the professional public sphere allows women the opportunity to take on jobs in uniform without compromising their religious beliefs. Although government jobs are secular in Britain, the freedom to express religion is not banned, a facet of British liberal democracies. Women who wear the hijab in uniform are prime examples of Britain's tolerance of difference and of British Muslim women's acceptance of British rule of law and values. They also are changing Muslim culture to accept women in uniform as authority figures. Working as police and playing sports are not traditional women's roles, but Muslim women in Britain are changing their cultural norms to reflect British Muslim women's new roles in society.

Religious wear has also had its day in court in Britain, and faithful covered women use the legal system in the democracy to fight for their right to wear a traditional garment. By using the court to fight their battles, British Muslim women proved that they accepted British democratic values and rule of law. They fought for their civil rights of freedom of expression, which is an extremely important value of Britain's liberal democracy. This shows that they were willing to fight for individual freedoms in a way that they would not be allowed in many Islamic states. As a result, Britain has accepted difference just as the British Muslim women have accepted the British state values.

The fight against forced marriage is an important lens to view Muslim (and Sikh) women's struggle to integrate their religious (cultural) expectations with the modern British values of choice-based marriage. Though forced marriage is more of a cultural issue, Muslims are the largest population affected in Britain. These women work with the government to change policies which allow forced marriage; through women's fight, the British court system has changed its attitudes toward victims of forced marriage, recognizing that it is not a valid cultural value. Women incited change through valid British systems; they were able to remove the stigma and prejudice of invalid cultural processes and get treated with the same laws as non-Muslims and non-Sikhs. This is

extremely important not only on the gender level, but also as a non-ethnic Briton, and proves that these women work for equality and fair treatment, two important values of a liberal democracy such as Britain. These women work to change their cultural norms and behaviors because they are empowered by the freedoms that Britain offers. Because they live in a liberal democracy, British Muslim women are able to fight established, accepted cultural practices with the help of the British government.

The British government supports the fight against forced marriage because it is a prime example of how the concept of multiculturalism was skewed by those seeking to exploit this ideal. Changing the idea of what it means to be a British Muslim means to change perceptions of all Britons.

They have worked with the British government and through NGOs to change policies that affect victims and possible victims of forced marriage. The NGOs, run by Muslim and Sikh women, provide a range of services from shelter to legal assistance and job training to victims of forced marriage. This support system is run by the Groups like the SBS also work to ensure minorities (race and religion) are not stigmatized by British law. These women work to enhance the state of democracy for Britain, and specifically, for British Muslim (and Sikh) women through democratic means. These groups allow women to shift the meaning of what it means to be a South Asian in Britain. By sending the message that forced marriage and its consequences will not be tolerated, British Muslim and Sikh women are changing their culture from the inside. They focus on their culture through the shelters and assistance programs in order to eliminate acceptance of forced marriage.

The British state recognizes that women fighting forced marriage have unique challenges. The development of the Forced Marriage Act and the Forced Marriage Unit resulted from the government's work with female leaders from the Muslim and Sikh communities. This joint effort showcased how important these women are to the government; by seeking advice from female activists, the government showed that the women's advice and points of view regarding forced marriage were extremely valuable as policies began to develop. Although the FMA and FMU have received criticism, the fact that the British government addresses the problem of forced marriage shows that

government officials wish to assist members of society. Women who assisted with policy-making made it clear that Muslim and Sikh women want the same rights of choice as other women in society, regardless of their illegitimate cultural “tradition” of forced marriage.

Perhaps the most poignant battle British Muslim women fight is to gain entrance to their place of worship, the mosque. Though many mosques do not allow women access to services or prayer, groups like MPAUCK are trying to change that through democratic means. Handing out pamphlets, signing petitions and holding peaceful protests in front of mosques are all liberal democratic means of demonstration. These women wish to incite change by utilizing principles their society values, proving their integration into British society. This fight also proves their integration into society because it asks for gender equality in the mosque. Gender equality is a principle value of British society since the early twentieth century, and British Muslim women are expanding equality to a religious place of worship that is traditionally dominated by men.

Although about half the mosques in Britain allow women, there is a disparity of services offered. To combat this, the Charity Commission published a list of Britain’s top 100 mosques for women. Though this list is a good starting point for assessing mosques, the criteria of this list were subjective and left open to interpretation. The “best” mosques may or may not meet the criteria in the manner the Charity Commission intended. Male-lead committees that run mosques cannot correctly assess if the mosque provides adequate services and space for women, as they will never participate in a mixed-gender environment within the mosque. Women have to fight for entrance into the mosque because men want to have a private space that is separated from the women and the lack of centralization of mosques in Britain allows for no standardization of mosque criteria. However, British Muslim women continue to fight for the democratic principle of equality through democratic means. By adopting the liberal democratic principles of Britain, Muslim women have transformed their culture into one of gender equality.

British Muslim women are not alone in their struggle for a hybrid identity; women in many liberal democracies question their rights and values between religion and

politics. The British government has given women the space to develop these identities, though sometimes women had to force this space (and thus exert their desire for rights through democratic means). British Muslim women are a prime example of how a group of people can integrate, take on values of a society and embrace democracy without losing religious identity.

## **B. FUTURE RESEARCH**

Additional research in this area would enhance the outcome of the findings. A comparative case study between Muslim women in different European countries would be beneficial to determine if Muslim women trend towards democracy, and if so, what the flashpoints of their activism are. This would be especially interesting if Britain was compared to a country which adopted integrationist strategies at the outset of their major immigrant influx. A comparison of the levels of integration between British Muslim men and women could also be done. This study could discuss how each gender accepts (or does not accept) British values. Scholars would then be able to determine if gender does or does not play a role in integration.

Another facet that scholars could explore is how age and being a “second-generation” British Muslim affects a woman’s outlook and desire to integrate. Philip Lewis’ *Young, British and Muslim* analyzes the difference between young and older Muslim men, but barely brushes the surface of the gender differences and opinions of younger women. Because many of the young women are second-generation native-born Muslims in Britain, do their perspectives differ from those of their mothers? Have they embraced Britain more, or has the recent upswing in Islamism pushed them away from British values?

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