

‘The Muslim woman activist’: solidarity across difference in the movement against the ‘War on Terror’

Abstract

Feminist scholars have widely noted the centrality of gendered discourses to the ‘War on Terror’. This article shows how gendered narratives also shaped the collective identities of those opposing the ‘War on Terror’. Using interview data and analysis of newspaper editorials from movement leaders alongside focus groups with grassroots Muslim women activists, this article demonstrates how, in responding to the cynical use of women’s rights to justify war, participants in the anti-‘War on Terror’ movement offered an alternative story. Movement activists deployed representations of Muslim women’s agency to challenge the trope of the ‘oppressed Muslim woman’. I argue that these representations went beyond strategic counter-narratives and offered an emotional basis for solidarity. Yet, respondents in the focus groups illustrated the challenges of seeking agency through an ascribed identity; in that they simultaneously refused and relied upon dominant terms of the debate about Muslim women.

Keywords

Muslim women, social movements, war on terror, collective identity, symbol

Introduction

Something horrible flits across the background in scenes from Afghanistan, scuttling out of sight. There it is, a brief blue or black flash, a grotesque Scream 1, 2 and 3 personified – a woman. The top-to-toe burka, with its sinister, airless little grille, is more than an instrument of persecution, it is a public tarring and feathering of female sexuality. It transforms any woman into an object of defilement too untouchably disgusting to be seen. It is a garment of

lurid sexual suggestiveness: what rampant desire and desirability lurks and leers beneath its dark mysteries? In its objectifying of women, it turns them into cowering creatures demanding and expecting violence and victimisation. Forget cultural sensibilities. (Polly Toynbee, 'Behind the Burqa', *The Guardian*, 28 September 2001)

The price you pay when you ally yourself with religious fundamentalists is a downgrading of the aspirations of women and gays. (Nick Cohen, 'Saddam's Very Own Party', *New Statesman*, 7 June 2004)

Gendered narratives have been central to the rhetoric and discourses of the 'War on Terror' (Abu-Lughod, 2010; Cooke, 2007; Zine, 2004). From 2001 when the Bush administration launched the 'War on Terror', the claim was that 'the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women' (Laura Bush, 2001). In Britain the 'pro-war left' similarly justified their support for war using civilisational narratives about 'saving Muslim women' from the oppression of patriarchal Muslim societies.

This article shows how gendered narratives also shaped the collective identities and ideologies of those opposing the 'War on Terror'. In responding to the cynical use of women's rights and Muslim women's identities to justify war, participants in the anti-'War on Terror' movement offered an alternative story. Movement activists deployed representations of Muslim women's agency to challenge the trope of the 'oppressed Muslim woman'. I argue that these representations went beyond strategic counter-narratives and became a condensing symbol for the whole as a whole, offering an emotional basis for solidarity.

Social movement scholars, seeking to explain how social movements create solidarity and sustain commitment amongst participants, have used the concept of collective identity extensively (Melucci, 1989; Morris, 1992; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Increasingly,

however, scholars have noted problems with the process of collective identity construction. For example, Einwohner et al. (2008) demonstrated the existence of contexts in which negotiating a collective identity can be 'hard work'; while McDonald (2002) has questioned the applicability of the concept of collective identity to many contemporary movements.

Many contemporary movements are loosely constructed without clear forms of leadership or group affiliations. Some scholars suggest political action in this form is more fluid, reflexive, and network based, than action formed around centralised political structures – more ideologically driven, collectivist projects (McDonald, 2006).

The movement against the 'War on Terror'ⁱ is pluralistic. It goes beyond single-issue campaigning to take an anti-imperialist orientation that challenges the 'War on Terror' agenda as a whole. While this movement is primarily a leftist political project, not centred on Muslim identity issues, it undoubtedly relates to Muslim activists' identity as Muslims. The 'War on Terror' has increased anti-Muslim racism; counter-terror measures and policing disproportionately target British Muslims (Fekete, 2004).

Diverse populations, such as the movement against the 'War on Terror' brought together, may have difficulty with collective identity negotiation, as different factions compete to have their voices heard (Einwohner et al., 2008: 6). The movement against the 'War on Terror' targets a range of political issues and involves participants across multiple identities, ideological perspectives, and political histories. No sameness of identity based on experience united participants; social movement scholars have shown that, in such cases emotion or ideology can provide the basis for creating internal solidarity (Neuhouser, 2008; Myers, 2008). Furthermore, scholars have demonstrated how condensing symbols can play an important role in recruiting strangers to a movement that has no social networks on which to draw (Jasper, 1997; Jasper and

Poulsen, 1995). This article extends these arguments by demonstrating how the condensing symbol of Muslim woman activist gave a diverse group of participants a means to construct a sense of shared identity (Melucci, 1989; Taylor and Whittier, 1992).

Yet each faction had a different interpretation of the symbol. While the multiple messages meant the movement could resonate across differences to create unity and solidarity, the message was sometimes ambiguous. Respondents in the focus groups illustrated ways that they simultaneously refused and relied upon the dominant terms of the debate about Muslim women, highlighting the complexity of trying to gain agency through an ascribed identity.

To some extent this ambiguity reflected a double bind that typically arises when social movements incorporate gendered meanings into their identities (Einwohner et al, 2000; Kuumba, 2001; Taylor, 1999). Gendered meanings are not constructed by movement participants alone; these are often imposed on the movement from without. In the official 'War on Terror' story, the dominant script interpellates Muslim women's identities, who often figure as central 'subjects of debate' (Bracke, 2011; see for example, Toynbee, 2001). 'Talking back' to these dominant constructions of Muslim women's identities will be, therefore, partly influenced by the terms by which Muslim women have been addressed (Bracke, 2011).

In the first section of this article I will give a brief account of the formation and context of the leftist/Muslim alliance in the movement. I will consider the challenge of creating solidarity and cohesion in a movement characterised by internal differences and heterogeneity, before I explain why it is important to examine gendered processes, and the centrality of Muslim women's identities to the official story of the 'War on Terror'. I will then move on to discuss how participants negotiated gendered and religious differences at different levels of movement

leadership and participation. I will end the article with a discussion of the multiple meanings invoked by the symbol of the Muslim woman activist.

The left/Muslim alliance in the movement against the ‘War on Terror’

Members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), trade unions, the labour left, and other left groupsⁱⁱ founded the Stop the War Coalition (StWC) on 21st September 2001 at a meeting of around two thousand activists in central London, convened to follow the terrorist attacks on the twin towers. While Lindsey German, the Convenor of StWC, attested to the number of Muslims who attended this meeting, she described how, at the initial stages of formation, the movement lacked Muslim participation at leadership levels. Leftist movement leaders later made a concerted effort to recruit and establish a relationship with Muslim activists and organisations and develop networks with local mosques. StWC founded Just Peace as a vehicle with a specific remit to fulfill these objectives.

From April 2002, the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) became part of the leadership of the movement, following a large demonstration called by MAB against an assault by the Israeli Defence Force on a Palestinian Authority-controlled refugee camp, Jenin. StWC organisers invited MAB to join their coalition, MAB refused, wanting to maintain organisational independence. StWC, MAB and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) called their first joint demonstration on September 28th 2002.

This article focuses on how leftist and Muslim activists negotiated gendered, religious and political differences in the movement against the ‘War on Terror’.

While many leftist movement leaders celebrated the involvement of Muslims in the movement (see for example, Murray and German, 2005: 57), others suggested the alliance betrayed leftist

valuesⁱⁱⁱ, claiming that certain Islamic practices and values were incompatible with leftist progressive principles (Cohen, 2007; Glynn, 2012). In particular, opponents cited gender equality as an irreconcilable issue (Cohen, 2003b). When Salma Yaqoob, a hijab-wearing Muslim woman, was elected as the chair of Birmingham Stop the War Coalition, some members of far left groups raised objections, claiming that her Islamic beliefs would undermine leftists' commitment to women's and sexual minority rights. A group of leftist secular Muslims who worked closely with StWC also criticised the alliance. From outside the anti-War on Terror movement, the 'pro-war' left criticised the alliance as indicative of the anti-War on Terror's insensitivity to both the plight of victims of the political regimes of Iraq and Afghanistan and an abandonment of progressive gender politics (Cohen, 2004; Cohen 2007)^{iv}. These groups all articulated an incompatibility between the practice of Islam and leftist values; those who participated in the movement expressly urged keeping Muslim identity out of the movement's collective identity framing.

Pre-existing networks, fluid constituencies, and the formation of movement identities

Since the 1980s, scholars have argued that all social movements need to create a collective identity as the basis of mobilisation (Melucci, 1989; Morris, 1992; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Scholars maintained that whether the movement mobilised on the basis of class, gender, environmentalism or sexuality, the process of creating and maintaining these collective identities was similar (Calhoun, 1993; Polletta and Jasper, 2001). Yet, many scholars are beginning to question this orthodoxy (Holland et al, 2008; McDonald, 2002).

One important difference stems from the extent to which existing, inherited identities form the basis of mobilisation, solidarity, and continuity of struggle (Jasper, 1997; Jasper and Poulsen, 1995; Massoumi and Meer, 2014; Morris and Braine, 2001; Mueller, 2003;). Aldon Morris's (1984, 1992) work on the black civil rights movement in the United States demonstrated how a pre-existing

institutional and cultural skeleton of opposition existed which had laid the foundations for a more widespread movement. Latent forms of oppositional consciousness amongst the institutions, cultures, and lifestyles of oppressed groups came to the forefront in the face of a specific political struggle (Morris, 1992: 370, 1984). Similarly, scholars have shown how women's cultures created through common experiences of oppression foster the development of oppositional consciousness that sustains and contributes to an array of women's movements (Hurwitz and Taylor, 2012). Taylor (1996) demonstrated how post-partum self-help groups drew on the ideologies and experiences of earlier feminist movements to help link their conditions to women's inequality, thus challenging the widespread view of postpartum depression as an individual illness.

These studies demonstrate how oppositional cultures of oppressed groups shape what Morris and Braine (2001) call 'liberation' and 'equality special-issue' movements (Hurwitz and Taylor, 2012; Morris, 1984; Morris and Braine, 2001; Taylor, 1996; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). These movements are formed and located within systems of domination and subordination (Young, 1990). They mobilise pre-existing ideologies related to struggles of oppressed groups. Liberation movements are aimed at overthrowing a whole system of oppression; equality special-issue movements are aimed only at a specific mechanism of that oppression. In contrast, 'social responsibility' movements mobilise on the basis of identities that need to be created from scratch. 'Social responsibility' movements, such as environmental, peace, and anti-war movements seek to make governments act more responsibly. Activists in these movements adopt their identities voluntarily; they choose to be part of this movement. By contrast, in 'liberation' and 'equality special-issue' movements, the activists are implicated in the movement identity regardless of their involvement. So for example, African-Americans experienced oppression as African-Americans whether or not they took part in the civil rights movement (Morris and Braine, 2001: 34-37).

While the movement against the 'War on Terror' could, in many ways, be described as a 'social responsibility movement', it also sought to draw on existing Muslim networks. The 'War on Terror' was not a Muslim-only issue, but Muslims were directly implicated in it. Since the mobilisations of British Muslims against the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, British Muslims have been organised mainly within Muslim-specific organisations. While much British Muslim political action has orientated towards general civil society participation, religious identity is often the main focus and motivation behind their political engagement (Modood, 2009; Modood and Meer, 2010; O'Toole and Gale, 2013). In forging a collective identity against the 'War on Terror', the movement needed to align its collective efforts to the interpretative frameworks of existing Muslim groups and organisations while attempting to mobilise a wider constituency.

While inherited identities may be important to some movements, others form without any clear notion of a shared collective identity. Social movements form from fluid movement constituencies, such as Occupy Wall Street, Tahrir Square, and the Gezi protests. No delegation, formal representation, or spokespersons form the affinity groups. Some have described such movements as an assemblage – having both consistency and fuzzy borders (Nail, 2013; Tampio, 2009). While an assemblage has some coherence, its shape changes constantly. An anti-war rally, for example, is an assemblage whose numbers of participants may change at any moment and whose messages may conflict and complement each other (Tampio, 2009: 394).

Judith Butler theorises the significance of the public performance when bodies come into alliance: 'The claim of equality is not only spoken or written but made when bodies appear together or, rather, when, through action, they bring the space of appearance into being' (Butler, 2011: 7). Many autonomous actors in the global justice movement, Occupy protests, and radical ecologists reject ideological purity, representative politics and fixed identities on principle. These movements

are characterised by diversity and weak ties – not shared characteristics and principles or affiliations to specific groups.

Members of contemporary social movements hold differing degrees of membership and associations. The movement against the 'War on Terror' mobilised millions of people, including the largest street demonstration in Britain to date. The constituency was fluid and participants held different degrees of association to the movement. While organisers of StWC and other social movement organisations may have a clear sense of membership, other activists could identify with a movement while holding a 'biodegradable' (Fominaya, 2010: 400) connection to it.

While the significant street-based mobilisations of the anti-War on Terror movement marked its high points of visibility, active networks of activists maintained the movement in periods of less explicit visibility. These activists did not always share ideologies, beliefs, interests or goals; nor was their network a permanent formation. Groups within it formed and dissolved regularly; the network itself was an ongoing process. Relationships within such networks involve emotional investments and affective ties (Melucci, 1989, 1996).

Jasper (1997) examines the cognitive dimensions of the work involved in recruiting to movements without clearly defined constituencies; in particular he demonstrates the role played by condensing symbols in movements' rhetorical strategies that seek to create a sense of moral outrage. Condensing symbols are multi-referential frames that can simultaneously convey a range of meanings. Certain objects and classifications are 'good to think with'; they attract charged meanings and connotations. Such classifications hold emotional depth and resonate with multiple meanings implicit in people's worldviews (Jasper, 1997: 160). In the absence of pre-existing networks or collective identities to draw on, movements use moral shocks to create a sense of outrage that propels people into collective action. So for example, the animal rights movement

recruited through powerful images of animal suffering that could connote a range of different meanings and appeal to implicit worldviews; this created the affective emotional bonds that could draw people into the movement (Jasper, 1997: 175; Jasper and Poulsen, 1995). I extend this argument by claiming that movements that lack the pre-existing histories and solidarities drawn from shared experiences of oppression can use condensing symbols to help forge the necessary affective bonds *between participants* within the movement; acting as a basis for creating solidarity.

Muslim women, social movements, and the 'War on Terror'

Gender can be a particularly powerful condensing symbol because it suggests boundaries and categories through which we situate ourselves in the world (Jasper, 1997: 160). Gender provides symbolic meanings at the interactional level in our everyday social interactions in the way we 'do' and perform gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Taylor and Whittier (1992) demonstrate how the politicisation of everyday life within lesbian feminist communities acted to resist established social definitions of everyday gendered interactions (118).

All social movements are in some way gendered (Einwhoner et al., 2000; Kuumba, 2001; Taylor, 1999). Gender is a key organising principle in social life; gender guides social interactions and is the basis of stratification and structural inequalities. This means that gender operates in social movements at a number of stages and levels. Gender can shape movements in the initial stages of emergence or in processes of mobilisation and recruitment (Rodriguez, 1994). Gender can also shape organisational structures and movement roles (Neuhouser, 1995; Robnett, 1997).

Gendered symbols and meaning systems are often incorporated into the logic of social movements and utilised strategically to lay claims about the status of the movement (Swidler, 1986). For example, national liberation movements often use gendered ideologies to characterise

their struggle. Social movements often use feminine or masculine meanings to mark the moral boundaries of their movements. So, for example, in the Greenham Common peace movement of the 1980s, the solution to (male) violence was to be found within the feminine characteristics and feminist principles of a women-only peace movement (Roseneil, 1995). The assumed 'feminine qualities' of peacefulness and nurturance were used to legitimise the movement's moral claims about war and peace (Einwohner et al., 2000: 687).

This article explores how gendered processes shaped collective identities and ideologies of the movement against the 'War on Terror'. It draws on research from a study which examined the role Muslim women played in the movement (Massoumi, forthcoming). Muslim women had both formal and informal leadership positions (Bunting, 2010; Massoumi, 2010; Robnett, 1997). Given that leftist and Muslim organisations tend to be male dominated at leadership levels (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Elshayyal, 2014; James, 2012), this itself was worthy of study (Massoumi, 2010).

Muslim women's identities have been central to the rhetoric and discourses of the 'War on Terror'. Feminist scholars (Abu-Lughod, 2010; Cooke, 2007; Zine, 2006), writing in the aftermath of 9/11, have shown how the 'War on Terror' was constructed, waged, and legitimised on a gendered terrain (Hunt and Rygiel, 2008; Tickner, 2002; Young, 2003). Here Miriam Cooke's (1996) concept of a 'war story' is useful. Cooke describes the war story as the official, state-sponsored story about why we go to war and how the war is won. She explains how the war story gives coherence and order to wars that are often complex and confusing. War stories rely on evoking familiar dichotomies such as 'beginning and ending/foe and friend/aggression and defence/war and peace/front and home' (Cooke, 1996: 15). These rely on traditional gender tropes and notions of masculinity and femininity, such as women's need for protection is why men fight. These war stories rely on essentialist clichés. Portrayals of Muslim women as oppressed victims have been consistent throughout the official story of the 'War on Terror' (Abu-Lughod, 2010; Young, 2003).

Hunt and Rygiel (2008) argue that the political purpose of such official war stories is to camouflage the actual politics, interests, and agendas that are at play, to legitimise war (Hunt and Rygiel, 2008: 3). The war story about Muslim women being liberated from their supposed traditional societies deflects attention away from the violence and hardship women often suffer as a result of war. This includes sexual violence by soldiers, loss of male family members, and the burden of care of children, elderly, and the injured in the absence of male family members (Hunt and Rygiel, 2008: 10). Lila Abu-Lughod (2010) highlights how such rescue narratives ignore both the impact of war and militarisation and the diversity and richness of Muslim women's lives. Stories about Muslim women are told through voyeuristic accounts of honour crimes, or the oppression of veiling, rather than political, social, and historical analysis of the development of repressive regimes that may have shaped Muslim women's lives.

The 'War on Terror' not only constructs Muslim women as 'victimised women to be rescued' but also relies on 'hyper-masculinised rescuers' and 'cowardly oppressors'. Such narratives demonise Muslim men as fundamentalists, extremists, and terrorists who threaten to undermine the 'freedom' and 'democracy' of the West. Authors have demonstrated how these narratives are imbued with a politics of discipline and control (Puar, 2002; Rygiel, 2008). Scholars have highlighted the way in which feminist and gender politics become entangled with orientalist and imperialist narratives reminiscent of a colonial past (Bracke, 2012). Liberal feminist and gay rights frames are used as the basis to mark out the superiority of European and American identities. Western identities are deemed cosmopolitan, feminist, and gay-friendly as opposed to the backward, Muslim 'other'. Jasbir Puar (2002, 2007) captures the complex manifestations of sexualised racism, racialised nationalism, and gendered practices that constitute 'homonationalism'. Homonationalism refers to the discourses that simultaneously incorporate some homosexual bodies while quarantining others through the articulation of race/nation and

manifestations of sexual exceptionalism. Gendered and sexual emancipation, as well as freedom and democracy, are framed as exclusively Western concepts (Abu-Lughod, 2010; Bracke, 2011; Puar, 2002, 2007). Feminism is thus instrumentalised, claimed by Western governments as a signal to the rest of the world that this is what freedom now means (McRobbie, 2009). These narratives are developed in exclusionary ways that position some groups as normal in contrast to deviant others (Bracke, 2011; Puar, 2002). Thus these scholars demonstrate how a watered-down version of sexual minority and women's rights such as gay marriage rights, de-veiling, or participation in consumer culture come to stand in for total liberation from oppression. Those whose desires do not fit this frame are therefore excluded from the body politic.

These disciplinary narratives seek only to include Muslim women who are amenable to the 'War on Terror' agenda (Rashid, 2013). For example, in the UK, initiatives to 'empower Muslim women' (Rashid, 2013) within New Labour's domestic counter-terrorism strategy assumed Muslim women to be more liberal and beneficial to fostering a Muslim mainstream than Muslim men, presenting women as the key to countering the disenfranchisement of Muslim radicalisation and extremism in the UK (Brown, 2008). These initiatives welcomed Muslim women if they opposed the 'bad Muslim men'.

Similarly, gendered meanings hold a double bind for social movements. In seeking to link their movement message to potential supporters, social movement participants need to strike a careful balance between relying on pre-existing cultural beliefs and values and creating new ones (Tarrow, 1992: 188). Whilst social movements may rely on traditional notions of gender to make their movement resonate with existing beliefs, such traditional notions may undermine the transformative potential of their message (Einwohner et al., 2000: 693; Neuhauser, 2008). Not only do movement participants construct gendered meanings to portray a particular image, but outsiders may attribute them to the movement (Einwohner, 2002; Steuter, 1992). Opponents,

bystander publics, and targets of the movement will hold ideas of gender that they impose on the movement and use to undermine and discredit it (Einwohner, 1999).

Methods and data collection

Data gathering proceeded as follows. First, between March 2009 and October 2009, I carried out 23 semi-structured interviews with movement leaders. The interviewees represented the broad range of organisations within the movement: StWC, MAB, the British Muslim Initiative, Just Peace, Respect, Red Pepper, Helping Households Under Great Stress, Cageprisoners, Act Together, Women for an Independent Iraq, Inquest, Newham Monitoring Project, City Circle, Friends of Al Aqsa and Palestine Solidarity Campaign (See Appendix 1). I recruited participants through organisational mechanisms. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using Nvivo software.

Secondly, I analysed *Guardian* 'Comment is Free' articles written by movement leaders. The *Guardian* is a British left-leaning newspaper, and 'Comment is Free' is a key feature of the newspaper's website, an online blog that hosts a series of editorial commentaries from journalists, academics and a range of civil society actors. It provides a forum for discussion among what Gabriel Almond (1960) calls an 'attentive public' – an educated minority within society that is both interested in, and informed about, policy making (Almond, 1960: 138). The movement seeks to mobilise this group and hopes that it will diffuse its arguments against the 'War on Terror' to the 'general public' (Almond, 1960: 138).

Thirdly, I carried out four focus groups (Gamson, 1992; Melucci, 1989) comprising four Muslim women activists on British university campuses^v (see Appendix 2). In contrast to the generally elite section of the movement writing in the *Guardian*, the focus groups represent a more grass-roots-level constituency.

Findings

In the following sections I outline the complex negotiations of gender and religious difference that took place in creating the collective identity of the movement. As Einwohner et al. (2008) demonstrate, identity construction within a social movement can be hard work, when movements contend with a diverse range of participants, and different factions struggle to have their voices heard. Moreover, complexities arise when participants have to publicly present themselves as similar to those whom they oppose in private (Einwohner, 2008: 7). In the case of the anti-War on Terror movement, opponents centred their criticisms on the Muslim/left alliance. Movement actors deployed a series of counter-narratives from a range of standpoints and for a range of audiences using Muslim women's identities to challenge such critiques. Muslim women's identities were deeply intertwined in contemporary discourses of the 'War on terror', which made it impossible for Muslim women to escape the label of Muslim women, or, as Cooke's (2007) neologism, 'Muslimwoman', describes the collapse of gendered and religious dimensions of Muslim women's identities in such discourse. A Muslim woman is a Muslimwoman regardless of her political subjectivities. I argue that the symbol of the Muslim woman activist became a multi-referential frame that could simultaneously represent a variety of different meanings for the different factions and audiences; this enabled these participants to share a common meaning in their political struggle.

In framing the movement's identity, activists used Muslim women's identities in two ways. Firstly, they celebrated the role Muslim women played in the movement. Secondly, they strategically deployed Muslim women's identities to debunk civilisational modes of feminism. Yet, respondents in the focus groups illustrated the difficulty encountered in gaining agency from an ascribed identity (Cooke, 2007). In speaking to already existing narratives of Muslims women they

simultaneously refused and relied upon the dominant terms of the debate about Muslim women (Bracke, 2011).

The alliance between Muslims and the left

The movement against the 'War on Terror' was a broad, pluralistic movement, characteristically a 'social responsibility' movement (Morris and Braine, 2001). In seeking to align the collective identity with political subjectivities and experiences of Muslim groups as well as a leftist audience, movement leaders deployed mixed identity strategies, which simultaneously emphasised similarities and differences (Bernstein, 1997, 2008, 2009) with respect to Muslim identities.

On the one hand, some activists adopted a strategy that sought to emphasise similarities (Bernstein, 1997: 538) between Muslim participants and others. Some Muslim activists explained how in the initial stages of the movement, they had to actively reassure some Muslims that involvement in the movement did not conflict with their Muslim identity or their commitment to Islamic principles. Similarly they felt that many leftist activists needed to also learn that Muslims were not a sectarian, inward-looking group but were concerned with a whole range of social justice issues that affected society at large. They stressed how alliances across common principles led to a creation of a new type of politics: it had raised the political awareness amongst Muslim groups; encouraged a participatory approach to politics; and opened up spaces for Muslim activism:

As Muslims we have to be seen to be part of the mainstream in terms of working with all sections of society towards common goals; in particular, not just working for Muslim issues.... Iraq thing is not a Muslim issue. Palestine is not a Muslim issue... The fact there was this contingency of the simple cause of anti-war is something to be proud of really. We needed to show that British Muslims were indeed part of British society and we could work together. (Ruqayyah Collector, Respect)

The movement supported these activists' quest to make this point *as Muslims* by creating Just Peace, a group within StWC specifically for Muslims. (The group dissolved when MAB allied with StWC in 2002.) It also explicitly accommodated religious practice, incorporating a communal breaking of the fast, with a prayer led by an Imam at the movement's second public demonstration which occurred during the month of Ramadan. With these early measures in place, StWC succeeded in creating a lasting and secure relationship with MAB on an alignment of anti-imperialism and Muslim identity politics. As one respondent described it, Muslims immediately recognised that the 'War on Terror' targeted Muslims:

Whether we liked it or not we [Muslims] had been thrust in the limelight of international events.... [H]undreds of people from across the country came together and said we need to move, because we are seeing the initial signs of what is going to become a global attack on countries of people of a particular faith and race, under the guise of here fighting terrorism. (Anas Altikriti, British Muslim Initiative)

Recognising these forces, the anti-imperialist wing of the movement against the 'War on Terror' sought to develop a distinctly Muslim identity. These participants wanted to influence the national political agenda, not only in regard to the issues surrounding the 'War on Terror' but in successfully asserting a politicised conception of a British Muslim identity:

Now the community that is being targeted is the Muslim community. We do need a Muslim leading figure, an organisational body, that would have the Muslim community understand the nature of the kinds of threats they were facing. (Anas Altikriti, British Muslim Initiative)

Participants in the anti-imperialist wing questioned the desirability of being a 'mainstream Muslim' and asserted a more antagonistic notion of a Muslim political identity that transcended the liberal,

radical divide (Bernstein, 1997: 538), challenging the dichotomies of dividing Muslims into ‘the good and the bad’:

You know this kind of dividing Muslims into what kind of Muslim you are- extremist Muslim, moderate Muslim, acceptable Muslim. No what’s this nonsense going around? But that’s the divide, it’s that divide and rule kind of mentality. (Shamuil Joarder, Friends of Al Aqsa)

Some participants rejected both liberal and anti-imperialist conceptions of Muslim identity in the movement. They felt that the majority of the leadership prioritised a *religious* Muslim identity, and left little space for an alternative *secular* Muslim identity. Rather than foster genuine integration between Muslims and non-Muslims, they claimed that the movement had been a top-down alliance with only those at the top of high-profile Muslim organisations. This, they felt, relied on a homogenous notion of Muslim identities, leaving little room for critical perspectives that could create a hybrid identity as the basis for transformative politics:

[StWC] also capitulated in the sense that rather than having multiple voices of the Muslim community, they accepted that these were the people of Muslim leadership and that squeezed the progressive Muslim bloc until it was narrower and narrower and narrower. We were moved out of that space. It was no longer possible within the anti-war movement to be able to maintain that strong [progressive] voice.... That dynamic also prevented the real explosion of maybe something progressive...a pluralist movement that would be able to accommodate the greens, the reds, the Muslims, the black community, the Arabs, you could have done that and that would have been fascinating. (Asad Rehman, Newham Monitoring Project)

These participants associated overt embrace of religious leadership with conservatism and traditional politics. For example, in the interview, Asad Rehman frequently referred to 'progressive Muslims' as opposed to the 'religious Muslims' and, in fact, associated the emergence of a distinctly religious Muslim leadership with a state-sponsored attempt to undermine the radical black community politics of the 1980s (Sivanandan, 1990).

Celebrating the role of the Muslim woman activist

While participants made explicit reference to religion as a source of difference, they seemed less comfortable in discussing the idea that there may be any differences between Muslims and non-Muslims over questions of gender. Partly participants were concerned with how opponents might use such discussions against them. Even participants who had emphasised the importance 'women's rights in Islam' admitted that fighting Islamophobia and racism had to take priority.

One participant acknowledged that there were differences over gender politics between Muslims and leftist activists, but mentioned how there was an explicit strategy to avoid discussions over this due to potential disagreements:

[T]he goals of many left wing liberal human rights types organisations coincide with Muslim organisations when it comes to representing minority groups. There are many areas where there are no overlaps, in fact there is direct opposition. For example the rights of homosexuality in Muslim countries or the right for women to decide abortion, there are areas where they completely clash but because the nature of work that they do and [we] are doing, they come together on common goals, and on others they leave. [We] never deal with those issues anyway, if they did there'd probably be fireworks! (Anonymous)

While others suggested that no significant differences exist:

Traditional values that sometimes identified with Islam often aren't specifically Islamic, they are traditional values, which says that the man is the head of the household and the women and the children are subordinate to him... You know it's not like people are sitting there grinding corns to make their husbands dinner. For whatever reasons people wear the hijab, or niqab, it doesn't prevent them from doing things. (Lindsey German, StWC)

Some stressed how these potentially abstract discussions were irrelevant; it was the fact that Muslim women were involved and politicised in the movement that was more important.

At the same time, participants showed strong awareness of Muslim women's presence within the movement. For example, some leftist men activists who had expressed disquiet over religious identities in the movement more generally, idealised the role of Muslim women in the movement. They described Muslim women activists as better and harder working than male activists; the 'backbone of the movement':

I think that of course in this whole period women have basically been central, men have been a waste of time. It's odd, I mean pretty much in everything from the anti-war movement, the most dynamic people are the young women, who went in and did more work, would be at the schools leafleting, outside the mosques, helping steward, doing all the day to day, helping make the placards. At the first demonstration when we looked for stewards, if you look at the pictures, the majority are young Muslim women wearing the hijab, stewarding, they are the big Muslim contingent. (Asad Rehman, Newham Monitoring Project)

These participants emphasised the presence of Muslim women in describing the success of an event, a group, or an organisation in the movement. One participant refers to 'genuinely

progressive meetings with Muslim women' as if Muslim women were the emblems of the liberal values of the movement. Miriam Cooke (2007) describes the Muslimwoman as a marker of the moral boundaries of Muslim communities. She says:

The Muslimwoman, veiled or unveiled, has become the cultural standard for the Umma, or global Muslim society. The religious and gendered exemplar confirms and highlights the morality of the Umma. (Cooke, 2007: 141)

One respondent commented on the prominence of Salma Yaqoob in the movement, suggesting it was tokenistic:

So for example, you have the Salma Yaqoob phenomenon, the anti-war movement decide, Salma Yaqoob great, looks photogenic, very articulate, mother, kids, fits all the tick boxes if you wanted a spokesperson and a woman. Excellent, let's project her, you put her on lots and lots of platforms. (Anonymous)

This activist's comments were part of his wider criticisms of the StWC; he argued that StWC chose very specific speakers at its events in order to portray a certain image. His comments undermine Salma Yaqoob's important leadership within the movement (Bunting, 2010)^{vi}, reducing her role to a marketing strategy.

As Miriam Cooke (2007) highlighted, Muslim women cannot escape the label of Muslimwoman. While some Muslim women reject the all-encompassing label of Muslimwoman, others embrace it, deploying it strategically in order to change it (Cooke, 2007: 141). However, this is a complex process of gaining agency through an ascribed identity.

Many of the Muslim women leaders I interviewed talked explicitly about deploying their identities to debunk stereotypical portrayals of Muslims, particularly victimised depictions of Muslim women.

I think that people expect Muslims to be reactionary on certain questions, i.e. homosexuality, treatment of women etc.... But I guess it's a bit difficult, when you're talking to this political [Muslim] women about how oppressed other Muslim women are. You can really knock it down quite easily! (Ruqayyah Collector, Respect)

In *The Guardian* 'Comment is Free' pages, the movement sought to appeal to a leftist audience of attentive publics (Almond, 1960). Here Muslim women leaders deployed their own individual Muslim identities for strategic purposes. Liberal and leftist opponents had a strong voice on these pages; Salma Yaqoob deployed her identity as a Muslim woman to deflect charges that Islamic practices and leftist progressive values are incompatible. In an article entitled 'The Women Won It' she sought to redefine Muslim identity in what Bernstein (2008: 294) terms an 'identity contest', describing the Respect political party^{vii} she represented as 'the only party with a visible female presence at the polling stations' (Yaqoob, 2006). She countered the charges levelled by Nick Cohen, who had said the movement was 'lost in identity politics and victimhood' (Cohen, 2006). In Yaqoob's description, the presence of Muslim women activists, 'challenged the traditional conservatism that denies leading public positions to women, and challenged the old order, which treats our communities as silent voting fodder' (Yaqoob, 2006).

Religion, women's rights and anti-imperialism: exposing camouflaged politics

Strategic identity deployment was not always straightforward; negotiating allegiances of anti-imperialism, women's rights, and Muslim identity was challenging, especially in the face of liberal arguments in favour of the 'War on Terror' as justified on humanitarian grounds (Cohen, 2003a).

Haifa Zangana used her identity as an Iraqi woman and political opponent under Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq to debunk the claims that the war was 'humanitarian'. In an article entitled 'We have not been liberated' she wrote:

Long gone are the colourful parades of Iraqi women commemorating their achievements. Now we only have parades of death, where the 'liberated' and 'empowered' Iraqi women and girls, covered head to toe with hijabs and abayas, will queue at police stations, prisons, detention camps, hospital's 'fridges' and crowded morgues looking for the disappeared, kidnapped or their assassinated loved ones. (Haifa Zangana, 'We have not been liberated', 6 March 2007)

Here, Haifa Zangana is changing the terms of the debate; she is highlighting the plight of Iraqi women to demonstrate that the military intervention in Iraq had not brought human rights to Iraq. She exposes the conditions the 'War on Terror' have created, and thereby hints at its camouflaged politics (Hunt and Rygiel, 2008). At the same time, she draws on imagery of Muslim women's victimhood that may be familiar to the *Guardian* audience, of women 'covered head to toe with hijabs and abayas' in an ironic reference to journalists like Polly Toynbee (see, for example, the quote at the beginning of this article).

Haifa Zangana's articles about the overturning of secular family law in Iraq capture the intersection between anti-imperialist Muslim identity and women's rights' frames. She argues that placing family law under the control of religious authorities was a violation of women's rights:

Iraqi family law is the most progressive in the Middle East. Divorce cases are heard only in the civil courts (effectively outlawing the 'repudiation' religious divorce); polygamy is outlawed unless the first wife welcomes it (and very few do); and women divorcees have an equal right to custody of their children. The 'liberators' of Iraq can

take no credit for this.... Now it is under threat from the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council. IGC resolution 137 will, if implemented, eliminate the idea of civil marriage and place several aspects of family law – including divorce and inheritance rights – directly under the control of religious authorities.

...Over countless cups of Turkish coffee, I asked every woman I met why she seemed not to give a damn about a resolution that is surely going to change women's lives for the worse. I was met with kind smiles and the same weary reply: it's not going to change a thing.

Ten months after their 'liberation', Iraqi women have only just started to leave their houses to carry out ordinary tasks such as taking their kids to school, shopping or visiting neighbours. They do so despite the risk of kidnapping or worse. It is women and children who bear the brunt of the absence of law and order, the lack of security and the availability of weapons.'

(Haifa Zangana, 'Why Iraqi women aren't complaining', 19 February 2004)

Zangana charges advocates for the 'War on Terror' with hypocrisy. She argued that the real source of discontent for Iraqi women was the foreign occupation (see also Zangana, 2005). In the following section, I examine how Muslim women grassroots activists have received these frames in my focus groups.

'Talking back' to narratives of the oppressed Muslimwoman

Their strategic deployment of Muslim women's identities partly explains the reluctance for participants to explicitly acknowledge gender-related differences between Muslim and leftist activists in interviews. Focus group participants, as grassroots activists in the movement,

illustrated the complexity of 'talking back' to dominant narratives that construct the Muslimwoman because they lacked the constraints of movement leaders.

In general they had strong, negative reactions to a recent article I presented in the focus group discussion which reported that the newly elected president of Afghanistan was 'worse than the Taliban' for women (Boone, 2009):

FATIMA: I've become de-sensitized to things like that I just stop reading straight away, I just assume it's going to be really bad, whatever is coming is coming. Because it's been so long since this has been going on.

UZRA: Yeah it's like great, another article about Muslim women.

ZAHRA: The way they make out, that women don't go out without their husbands. It's not. I mean the thing is with all these articles, they all in a sense are saying that Muslim women are oppressed. That's really the message.

UZRA: And you know with that, what it is? With saying that women in Afghanistan are oppressed it is a way for them to say that Muslim women *here* are oppressed. We're wearing this [gestures to her hijab] because we are forced to wear it.

ZAHRA: Obviously, this is not made for Muslim people to read, it's, you know, *the Guardian*. They've got like a specific audience. You know they are doing it for white middle class men and women, who have these types of views. As a Muslim myself, I get on the train everyday with people like this and when they see me I can tell they believe this stuff.

For these respondents, the issues of women's rights within Islam and the representation of Muslim women in the media stood out to them as the core concerns when reading this article,

although the article focused largely on political machinations in Afghanistan. For these participants, the article's implication was a general claim about the oppressed position of all Muslim women, including Muslim women in Britain. In part, this showed their refusal to align with the terms through which they are being interpellated (Bracke, 2011). In their comments they redefine the terms of the debate and expose the camouflaged politics at the heart of these narratives:

NASIRA: Pretty much the same, it's just another article you open up and... when it comes to countries like Afghanistan and Somalia, and it's like 'yes the woman poor thing' the limelight is always put on them, first and foremost. I don't know whether it's to distract people from the real problems and real issues but I don't know whether.... I can't honestly say that they are really trying to help these women by trying to shed light on these issues, rather than use these women as a way of trying to discard the more important issues, political issues, perhaps social issues, in Afghanistan.

However, they accept elements of the dominant position, much like participants in Bracke's (2011) research on women connected to 'political Islam' in the Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands. Bracke (2011) demonstrates how the women she interviewed, simultaneously refused and assumed much of the dominant discourses that defined their political subjectivities (Bracke, 2011: 41). Likewise, my respondents' statements about Islam and feminism reflect a similar dynamic. While these participants accept, as the dominant discourse would have it, that Islam and feminism are incompatible, they re-appropriate definitions of gender equality and feminism:

ZAHRA: Islamically you can't be a feminist, not if you really understand what it is behind Islam.

FATIMA: But you don't need to be a feminist because Islam gives you everything you need as women.

FATIMA: I think it's a minority of people that describe themselves as Islamic feminists. And I have read about them as well. In a way they do make me really angry.

NASIRA: I don't know how this is going to sound, and I don't know what other people think, but personally I think that people who say that they are both Muslim and feminist are opportunist. I don't know whether you have heard of Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

[Everyone: yeah] She goes on about battered women, and they don't have any rights, they don't have that. She doesn't state that she's a feminist but all her arguments are like that. It seems that the best way to put yourself forward and get media attention is to come out and say you're a feminist, you're a Muslim feminist.

[All: yeah]

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a former Dutch politician of Somali origin, a former Muslim, whose main aim is to publicly campaign against Islam. She argues that Islam is a threat to women, and any Muslim woman who claims to voluntarily choose to adopt her religion, and its associated practices such as the hijab, does so as a form of false consciousness, as 'the Caged virgin' (Hirsi Ali, 2006).

In referencing Ayaan Hirsi Ali, my participants hint at a group that includes Irshad Manji and Azar Nafisi, writers who exploit the label of Muslimwoman (Bahramitash, 2005; Zine, 2010). These women market themselves as dissident insiders and have carved out a dominant space within the Muslimwoman framework, creating polarising discourses that differentiate 'good Muslimwomen' from 'bad Muslimwomen' (Zine, 2010: 111; cf Mamdani, 2004). The public platform given to Ali, Nafisi and Manji within mainstream media, (Zine, 2010) has the effect of disarticulating feminism

(McRobbie, 2009), creating a faux feminism, that is co-opted and resold, and undermines solidarity across different groups of women.

Participants accepted the dominant narrative of feminism's incompatibility with Islam; yet, this was based on a critique of what they perceived as a hegemonic 'middle class' feminism. As one participant said:

RANIA: [I]t panders to that feminist rhetoric in this country... [T]hat ideology in Britain... [i]t's infiltrated all mainstream intellectual and academic circles. You always have a feminist perspective and a feminist agenda.

By critiquing the terms of this hegemonic form of feminism, these participants re-appropriated the idea of what gender equality meant, reclaiming it within an Islamic framework. So while they rejected the *label* of 'feminist', they argued that they did not need feminism, because Islam had a superior model of women's rights, which pre-dated any Western model.

These women rejected the dominant idea that Islam oppressed them, locating their oppression in the public perception of them as Muslimwomen, often in the form of the public reaction to their head scarves. It is precisely this erasure of diversity of Muslim women, Miriam Cooke (2007) describes in her label, the Muslimwoman:

ZAHRA: Going back to the oppression thing about Muslim women, and I think that we are oppressed in a way. Like you know you say that we will get a job it's because of our talent not the way we look. But really because of the way we're dressed {gestures over her dress} there are less jobs we are going to get. The way that the media is presenting us now, maybe in the past it was more equal for us. But now, it's becoming worse.

Discussion: Muslim women as a condensing symbol

Movement leaders celebrated the role of Muslim women activists and deployed Muslim women's identities to claim a certain status for the movement. They used Muslim women's identities to highlight the liberal values of the movement, to counter claims that the movement was a reactionary alliance with intolerant Muslims. The focus group discussions highlighted the potential difficulties in strategic identity deployment as 'talking back' to dominant narratives partly relies on those narratives in the first place.

Despite these challenges, participants emotionally invested in the symbol of the Muslim woman activist. The Muslim woman activist became a moral ideal that they all shared, a condensing symbol, representing a variety of meanings:

- Muslim women symbolised liberal gender values and hence the progressive nature of the movement. In this understanding by the fact of Muslim women's presence, the movement was progressive. This relied on implicit assumptions that reactionary Muslim groups lack visible female presence. The movement strategically deployed Muslim women's identities as a means of affirming the movement's commitment to liberal values of gender equality.
- Simultaneously, Muslim women symbolised the transformative potential of the left. In this understanding Muslim women's presence in the movement symbolised the way in which a leftist movement provided the space for the development of progressive Muslim identities. As above, this relied on the implicit assumption of some incompatibility between Islam and gender equality that the movement had successfully overcome. Movement leaders invoked this symbolic meaning when they celebrated the role of Muslim women in the movement.

- Thirdly, the movement figured Muslim women as a challenge to cultural imperialism and Islamophobia. The emancipated position of the Muslim women activists disproved cultural imperialist and Islamophobic ideas that Muslim women are weak and oppressed. The strategic deployment of Muslim women's identities within the *Guardian* 'Comment is Free' and in the interviews with movement leaders portrayed this symbolic meaning.
- Finally, the focus group presented Muslim women as more empowered than their Western counterparts. In this version, the symbol of the Muslim woman activist reveals that Islamic beliefs and practices provide a model of gender equality superior to Western equivalents.

Many of these meanings relied on implicit assumptions about the degree of incompatibility between Islam and gender. Scholars have shown that familiar meanings of gender may help gain legitimacy for social movements, whereas unusual or alternative framings of gender may undermine the extent to which the social movement message can resonate with external audiences, creating a double bind (Einwohner et al., 2000: 693; Taylor, 1996, 1999). Movements engendered as feminine carry both the positive and negative elements of gendered images associated with femininity. In this case, the feminine deployment of Muslim identity also counters the threatening element of masculine Muslim identity (Ferber and Kimmel 2008; Puar, 2007). Masculine Muslim identities are often associated with patriarchy and aggression (Hopkins, 2006); presenting Muslim involvement in the movement as feminine can act to counter such associations. However, making reference to Muslim women as a symbol of progress implicitly relies on an idea that (Muslim-oriented) movements without Muslim women are reactionary. Thus the use of Muslim women's identities both relies on and challenges the images and contemporary discourses of Muslim women.

By conveying multiple messages and appealing to implicit worldviews, the condensing symbol of the Muslim woman resonated across internal differences and appealed to different audiences. Yet

this message was ambiguous, partly informed by existing constructions of the Muslimwoman (Cooke, 2007).

Conclusion

This article demonstrated how the movement against the 'War on Terror' was characteristically a 'social responsibility' movement but at the same time drew on the political subjectivities of Muslim minorities. This meant that it had to simultaneously appeal to the experiences of Muslim minorities while appealing to broader leftist audiences. To achieve this, the movement deployed a mixed identity strategy that simultaneously stressed similarities and differences (Bernstein, 1997). Yet as a social responsibility movement (Morris and Braine, 2001), the movement lacked the history or an institutional skeleton that could link the left and Muslim organisations. The condensing symbol of the Muslim woman activist, by conveying multiple messages and appealing to implicit world views, resonated across these differences. While this strategy had its limitations, the condensing symbol provided the emotional basis through which the movement could create solidarity in combining different meanings.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Participants

Anonymous 1

Anonymous 2

Anonymous 3

Anonymous 4

Mumtaz Abdillah, Helping Households Under Great Stress

Pav Aktar, National Union of Students, Labour party

Nadje Al-Ali, Act Together

Entesar Alobady, Women for an Independent Iraq

Anas Altikriti, Respect, British Muslim Initiative

Moazzam Begg, Cageprisoners

Naima Bouteldja, Stop the War Coalition, Just Peace, Red Pepper

Victoria Brittain, Stop the War Coalition Cageprisoners,

Ruqayyah Collector, NUS, Respect, Stop the War Coalition

Lindsey German, Convenor Stop the War Coalition

Shamiul Joarder, Stop the War Coalition, friends of Al Aqsa, Muslim Association of Britain,
British Muslim Initiative

Ghada Karmi, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Stop the War Coalition

Ismail Patel, Friends of Al Aqsa

Asad Rehman, Inquest, Stop the War Coalition, Newham Monitoring Project

Yvonne Ridley, Respect: the Unity Coalition, Stop the War Coalition

Zimarina Sarwar, Cageprisoners

Tahrir Swift, Women for an Independent Iraq

Shahedah Vawda, City Circle, Stop the War Coalition, Just Peace

Hilary Wainwright, Feminist, Red Pepper magazine

Appendix 2: Focus Group Participants^{viii}

Group 1: Muslim Council of Britain

Amal, Halima and Rania.

Group 2: Palestine Student Society and Stop the War Coalition

Maryam, Sofia, Sheenaz, and Talah.

Group 3: Darya, Derifa, Kamilah and Soumaya.

Group 4: Fatima, Nasira, Uzra and Zahra.

Notes

ⁱI refer to the movement as the movement against the 'War on Terror' because this movement included opposition to a number of dimensions related to the 'War on Terror' including foreign policy, Islamophobia, and civil liberty campaigns. My focus is on collaborations between leftist and Muslim organisations. The most prominent relationships between leftist and Muslim activists in this movement were found between StWC and MAB; between Cageprisoners and Reprieve; and in the formation of Respect, a political party created initially by anti-war activists.

ⁱⁱIncluding the Communist Party of Britain, as well as Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and The Green Party (Murray and German, 2005: 54).

ⁱⁱⁱFor a detailed account on how some left groups viewed an alliance with Muslims as potentially undermining socialist values, see Sarah Glynn (2012).

^{iv}The 'pro-war left' (Murray and German, 2005: 237) included journalists such as Nick Cohen, David Aaronovitch, Martin Bright, and John Lloyd. Although they cannot be characterised as a counter-movement; they did attempt to configure themselves as a new political grouping, they launched the 'Euston Manifesto', situated on the left of the political spectrum but defined against the identity of the anti-war movement (Lloyd, 2006; Johnson, 2008). There was also a second group of leftist journalists who opposed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but were critical of an alliance between Muslim organisations and the left (Alibhai-Brown, 2006). This included Yasmin Alibhai Brown, Sunny Hundal, Brendan O'Neill.

^vWith the exception of one group who were recruited through the Muslim Council of Britain.

^{vi}She was elected in the Sparkbrook ward of Birmingham in 2006 as a councillor for Respect – the unity coalition, a political party launched in 2004 by some sections of the left and some Muslim groups who had been involved in the movement against the 'War on Terror' (see Author, 2010). She was re-elected in 2010, stood down in July 2011 for health reasons, and resigned altogether in September 2012 because of internal disagreements (Edemariam, 2012).

^{vii}Respect was a political party, partly born of the anti-'War on Terror' movement.

^{viii}Pseudonyms are used for focus group participants to maintain anonymity.